

Drug and Alcohol Testing in Construction

Matthew Gilliver, Sales Manager, Express Medicals

Key Points:

- There are no legal requirements to test construction staff, but testing is often seen as best practice.
- It is mostly routinely conducted for safety critical roles, eg air traffic controllers, trackside workers.
- A comprehensive company drug and alcohol policy can only be of benefit – to employers and employees alike.
- Tests can form part of the recruitment process (pre job offer), occur randomly as a percentage of the workforce, after an incident or where you have a suspicion.
- Contracts of employment need to state that drug and alcohol testing is a condition of employment. Unions may have to be consulted to gain their support. Employees can refuse to be tested if it is not explicitly stated in their contract. All staff have to sign up to it – not just new employees. Employees should make their employers aware if they are taking any medically prescribed drugs which may affect the result.
- Tests can be conducted in a number of ways, eg via urine, hair or saliva sampling but there are tests which, although give an instant result – known as Point of Care Tests – cannot be used as grounds for disciplinary action and must be used in conjunction with other tests.
- A recent TV programme raised concerns as tests were picking up the presence of opiates in test samples when the employee had simply been consuming bread with poppy seeds. Matt explained that this was probably due to the testing threshold being set too low and consequently picking up all manner of substances! Make sure that the products used are reliable and fully researched.
- Drug and alcohol testing is a vital way to protect your company, its reputation and the health and wellbeing of your staff.
- Everyone has the right to work in a safe environment.