

Title:

Is Drug Screening Too Costly To Do Or Do Without? One Company Has The Answer!

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Summary:

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Article Body:

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With the challenge of recruiting qualified workers becoming more difficult all over the nation, the last thing American businesses can afford is to have major portions of its existing work force abusing drugs - on or off the job. The truth is that most employees do not engage in illicit drug use and most do not want to work side-by-side with drug abusers. A majority of employees are parents who are concerned about the effects of drug abuse on their children, now and in the future. Given this profile of the typical American workers, it is clear that substance-abuse prevention can and should be viewed as a common concern of both employers and employees.

We interviewed one company that has recognized the true damage that drugs in the workplace causes and why it is still prevalent. Labwire, Inc.

(<http://www.labwire.com>), a Houston, Texas based developer of online security

solutions, began addressing what many medium and large size companies have consistently failed to address—the true cost effectiveness of their testing programs. “What stops companies from being effective about drug prevention in the workplace is the apparent cost to do so”, states Dexter Morris, President of the company. “What most companies don’t understand is the wasted cost of NOT using the latest in technology management in handling such issues,” he added.

Drug use in the workplace costs this country billions of dollars every year in lost productivity, increased health problems and workplace accidents, to say nothing of the problems it causes us at the federal and state level with associated family problems. Contrary to the typical portrayal of drug abusers, many apparently functional drug and alcohol abusers manage to hold down full or part-time jobs, masking their destructive problem from their employers. In fact, over seventy four percent of all current illegal drug and heavy alcohol \* users hold down some type of job. \*(Those drinking five or more drinks per occasion on five or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, more than 8 million Americans use some type of illegal substance.

The overall cost of illicit drug abuse is estimated to have been \$160.7 billion in 2000, and 69 percent of these costs are from productivity losses due to drug-related illnesses and deaths. Reducing substance abuse positively impacts America’s economic landscape.

Medium businesses bear the greatest burden of substance abusers. Traditionally, larger employers participate in drug-free workplace practices. As a result, medium to large employers who do not have drug free workplace policies in place are - in essence - adversely selected against in terms of the employees that are left to hire. Another thing to note is that substance abusers will steer away from drug-free workplace companies. They will work for those businesses that don’t have a policy or a program and where there is no drug testing involved. Let’s face it, no abuser wants to be detected.

“The fact that medium and large size companies are at greatest risk is why we developed our web-based employee screening process. Any company can deploy this system inside of 30 days”, says Morris confidently. “In fact, we can train up to 100 human resource people on how to use our system in only 60 minutes online”.

Morris went on to say that just the cost of workers compensation claims can bury a company.

Drug-using employees are 3.6 times more likely to be involved in workplace accidents and five times more likely to file a workers’ compensation claim. Between thirty eight and fifty percent of all workers’ compensation claims are

related to substance abuse per the National Council on Compensation Insurance.. Substance abusers are three times more likely to use medical benefits than other employees.

According to Edward Poole, president and COO of OHS Health and Safety Services Inc., in Costa Mesa, Calif., several government and private industry studies concluded that each drug user in the workplace "can cost an employer an average of \$11,000-\$13,000 annually." Despite studies and surveys that indicate a significant number of substance abusers hold jobs and work while under the influence, Poole points out that many employers have an "it can't happen here" attitude about substance abuse in the workplace. "Once they get in there and implement a policy and start testing employees, they're usually very surprised by the results," he says.

Poole tells the story of one client who operated a small, local delivery service. When a representative from OHS Health and Safety Services visited the business owner, he stated repeatedly that there was no reason to conduct drug testing in that workplace. After all, the company had only 63 employees. After a couple of years of rebuffing them, the delivery service owner called OHS to start up an immediate screening program. Apparently the company had a change of heart after observing unusual behavior in their workforce. OHS showed up unannounced one day after performing roughly 45 days of drug free workplace education, and did what's called a "sweep." They were going to test every employee in the workplace.

Nine people immediately walked off the job. Says Poole, "One or two probably had deeply rooted beliefs in the right to privacy and all that crap, but it is probably safe to say that most of those nine employees would have tested positive." Out of the 54 who took the drug test, 19 tested positive for marijuana and several tested positive for cocaine as well. "The employer was shocked," says Poole, "Most employers have no clue how many employees are working under the influence."

Once a company decides to confront its potential workplace issue regarding illicit drug use the problem of finding the appropriate security company crops up. "There are a lot of companies professing to have the expertise to address drug screening issues", Morris cautions. "Just find out what their track record is and talk to some of their clients".

Many companies are heading the warnings about drug abuse in the workplace. According to data on companies that test employees, drug testing increased from twenty one and a half percent to almost eighty five percent in one six year period - a two hundred and fifty percent increase. Recent evidence suggests that

drug testing has now leveled off and in fact has decreased slightly, but primarily among medium businesses. National studies indicate that sixty six percent of the country's largest firms engage in some type of drug testing. Among Fortune 500 companies, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, drug testing likewise increased in use. For example, in 1985 about eighteen percent of Fortune 500 companies tested their employees. The number increased to a high point of forty percent by 1991. Among Fortune 1000 firms, forty eight percent of employees are subject to drug testing.

"These are good trends overall", says Morris when asked about the increase in drug screening across the US. The weakness in screening program administrations (drug testing and background screens) by medium and large size businesses is the increasing focus of Labwire's business model. "We know what the solution is for tens of thousands of companies, and we are it", concludes Morris. With companies like Labwire, who are building affordable applications, coming onto the scene, maybe your call center manager will have better attendance on future Monday mornings.

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