

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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Drug Testing in the Workplace - Does Your Loss Control and Safety Program Include Pre-Employment Drug Testing?

Effective pre-employment drug testing is costly. Drug testing can cost up to \$250 per applicant for a relatively standard test. When a large percentage of applicants could potentially fail drug tests, truss plants might conclude that drug testing is not cost effective.

However, truss plants that enforce drug testing have found it to be well worth the investment. Truss plant production employees who pass drug tests are more productive, have less downtime, and contribute to lower experience modifier rates. Safety and quality go hand-in-hand, so the safest workers typically produce the highest-quality work.

When is all said and done, businesses find that more stringent safety practices lead to greater profits.

ARE DRUG PROBLEMS COSTING YOU THOUSANDS?

If you're the only company in town that still does not require drug testing, what kind of employees are you likely to get? The answer is clearly obvious.

Substance abuse and related problems cost businesses hundreds of millions of dollars each year. The direct costs - those that can be objectively and specifically measured, include absenteeism, theft, health insurance claims, increased insurance premiums, and workers' compensation claims. In fact, it is estimated that 50 percent of all workers' compensation claims are attributable to substance abuse.

Hidden costs can be just as damaging: low morale, declining productivity, decreased performance, poor customer service, extra management and supervisory time spent with abusers, and recruitment and replacement costs.

What can you do to ensure a drug-free operation? Here are some suggestions:

- Take action. Many insurance carriers refuse to cover employers without an active screening program.
- Use a pre-employment drug test. Such a test allows you to take a close look at the intelligence and self-discipline of the people you're hiring, especially if your screening policy is clearly communicated.
- Wait for the test results before you put anyone to work. A substance abuser could become an ongoing financial burden if he or she is injured on the job.

- As a preventive measure, use a post-accident drug test. Employees who go through the pre-employment testing know that you're serious about maintaining a drug-free workplace. As part of the hiring process, have the prospective employee agree to undergo an accident drug test with the company doctor.

CNA can help you with additional information on how to best implement a drug-free workplace program.

Adapted from concepts from CNA, "The FMI Management Newsletter," August 1996, and University of Wisconsin Business Management Coursework by KirkGrundahl.

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