



# ORCA TALES



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## National Survey on Drug Use and Health

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Every year the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) conducts a National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). The survey is the primary source of information on the use of illicit drugs, alcohol, and tobacco in the civilian, non-institutionalized population of the United States aged 12 years old or older. Approximately 67,500 persons are interviewed in NSDUH each year.

For employers three of the more important highlights were:

- The rate of current use of illicit drugs among young adults aged 18 to 25 increased from 19.7 percent in 2008 to 21.3 percent in 2012, driven largely by an increase in marijuana use (from 16.6 percent in 2008 to 18.7 percent in 2012).
- Among unemployed adults aged 18 or older in 2012, 18.1 percent were current illicit drug users, which was higher than the rates of 8.9 percent for those who were employed full time and 12.5 percent for those who were employed part time. However, most illicit drug users were employed.
- Of the 21.5 million current illicit drug users aged 18 or older in 2012, 14.6 million (67.9 percent) were employed either full or part time.

These three bullet points should be a warning to employers who do not do pre-employment drug testing. It should also put employers on notice that pre-employment testing alone is not sufficient. Employers need to be aware that life changes and so do the habits of their employees.

### Expanded Opiates

Did you know most standard drug tests do not include tests for hydrocodone (Vicodin), hydromorphone, oxycodone or oxymorphone? Although prescription drug abuse is viewed by many as an epidemic, more people still die from prescription drug overdoses than in auto accidents. Most standard drug tests do not detect these drugs; however, they can be included via an "expanded opiates panel". Many believe the DOT drug test, or a DOT look-a-like test will include these drugs, but they are wrong.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) announced in February of 2012 that it has accepted the recommendations of its technical advisory committee, the Drug Testing Advisory Board (DTAB), and will proceed with revisions to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Mandatory Guidelines for Federal Workplace Drug Testing Programs. The recommendations include expanding the drug testing panel to include additional Schedule II prescription medications (e.g. hydrocodone, hydromorphone, oxycodone and oxymorphone), which are prescription painkiller opioid drugs. To date, this revision has not occurred.

These expanded opiates can be detected in urine, hair or saliva tests, but the customer has to request the "Expanded Opiate Panel" be included in their tests. The center for Disease Control and Prevention recently issued a report on the extent of the problem, highlighting the impact on women:

- Nearly 48,000 women died of prescription painkiller\* overdoses between 1999 and 2010.
- For every woman who dies of a prescription painkiller overdose, 30 go to the emergency department for painkiller misuse or abuse.
- About 18 women die every day of a prescription painkiller overdose in the US, more than 6,600 deaths in 2010. Prescription painkiller overdoses are an under-recognized and growing problem for women.
- Although men are still more likely to die of prescription painkiller overdoses (more than 10,000 deaths in 2010), the gap between men and women is closing. Deaths from prescription painkiller overdose among women have risen more sharply than among men; since 1999 the percentage increase in deaths was more than 400% among women compared to 265% in men. The rise relates closely to the increase in the prescribing of these drugs during the past decade.

\* "Prescription painkillers" refers to opioid or narcotic pain relievers, including drugs such as Vicodin (hydrocodone), OxyContin (oxycodone), Opana (oxymorphone), and methadone.



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### ORCA ♦ WISDOM ♦

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- S. G.*

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## Testing: Drugs, Alcohol and Your Employees

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Workplace drug and alcohol testing is an important policy topic for most businesses. Many employers use drug and alcohol testing as a step in their pre-employment screening. For some, law requires testing while others conduct testing by choice. Regardless of an employer's current policy, it is important to understand why an effective drug and alcohol testing program may be beneficial.

### 1. How/why do business owners decide to conduct drug and alcohol testing?

Some employers are required by law to test their employees for drugs and alcohol. Those covered by the Drug Free Workplace Act of 1988, as well as industries regulated by the U.S. Department of Transportation have mandated requirements regarding policies and procedures for drug and alcohol testing.

Employers not covered by these federal mandates may decide to test for financial reasons. Higher absenteeism, lower productivity, workplace accidents and an increase in worker's compensation insurance premiums can all be potential costs of substance abuse in the workplace. A successful drug and alcohol testing program can also earn a good reputation for a business in their community.

### 2. Is drug and alcohol testing more important in some industries than in others?

Studies have shown that there are industries with a higher percentage of employees with substance abuse issues. Accommodations, food services and construction show the highest rate of illicit drug use, while construction, arts, entertainment and recreation and mining show the highest rate of alcohol abuse. Employers should be aware that most people with substance abuse problems are employed.

### 3. When can employers test?

Every business and policy is different. Businesses mandated by the Department of Transportation or the Drug Free Workplace Act of 1988 must follow any stipulations set forth by those programs. Aside from that, many businesses choose to test in the following circumstances:

- Pre-Employment
- Randomly
- Post-Accident
- With Reasonable Suspicion

Testing in each of these circumstances requires having policy and procedure in place. This ensures that any actions taken are the same with each occurrence, and are non-discriminatory.

### 4. What types of testing are available?

Most employers choose to use a third party, offsite vendor or laboratory to provide drug and alcohol testing. The most common type of testing is 5- or 10- panel urinalysis. There are other options, including saliva or oral fluid tests, hair drug testing, and blood tests. Determining what type of testing is best for your business is dependent on a number of factors including your policies and your industry.

(Information for this article was obtained from "Managing Workplace Drug and Alcohol Testing at [www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org).)

This article is intended as information, and is not a substitute for legal or other professional advice.



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