

## The Need for Training

It continues to surprise us that some companies do not have an alcohol-testing program in place. Alcohol is the most abused drug in our society. We would be willing to bet that there are quite a few more abusers of alcohol than there are abusers of illegal drugs. Many workers believe that they can drink at any time and any place and that it will not affect their performance or their judgment. Of course, quite the opposite is true. It is well documented that alcohol causes impairment at levels as low as .020 g/210L. Studies compiled by the American Medical Association show that *everyone* is impaired at .040 g/210L. Would you want to walk through a warehouse where the forklift driver had a few beers for lunch? How about getting a tissue sample analyzed for disease by a lab technician who knocked back a couple of glasses of wine because it was her birthday? We didn't think so.

Employers may hesitate to introduce a testing program because they perceive it as being too difficult or time-consuming. Shockingly, some employers believe that alcohol use is acceptable—hey, it's a legal substance just like tobacco! If your company is regulated by the Federal Department of Transportation, then you are required to have a drug and alcohol testing program in place that meets the requirements contained in 49 CFR Part 40. Many non-regulated companies have adopted DOT look-alike programs that meet individual state regulations and, in many cases, companies will have an attorney or a consultant assist them in the development of their own testing program.

One of the biggest mistakes companies make when implementing an alcohol-testing program is not investing in adequate training. Training is one of the most important elements of a credible alcohol-testing program but, in many cases, gets the least attention. There are several areas where training is needed. DOT requires training in all three

of the following areas and non-regulated companies would be wise to follow suit.

First, your entire workforce should be trained on the testing program. How will it work? Who will be tested? What will they be tested for? What are they not allowed to do? Every possible contingency needs to be addressed (again, legal advice would be advisable). Distribution of a written policy is necessary to insure that all employees are aware of policy details.

Second, if your program includes testing for reasonable suspicion, supervisors and others who will make the determination that an alcohol test is necessary must be trained in recognizing the signs and symptoms of alcohol abuse. There are many sources for this training, which are quite effective.

Lastly, your Breath Alcohol Technicians (BAT) need training as well. The results obtained from any evidential breath-testing device (EBT) are only as good as the quality of the sample collected. If the operator of the instrument is not thoroughly familiar with every aspect of the process, then the alcohol tests they conduct will not be reliable or defensible.

Employers who take adverse personnel action against an employee for failing an alcohol test should be prepared to provide documentation that the BAT has been trained in accordance with the DOT rules (or your company policies) and that the training is adequate to insure the competence of the technician being trained. When searching for a training provider, employers should become familiar with the regulatory requirements before purchasing training.

The DOT alcohol-testing program requires technicians to be trained according to a specific curriculum, which is very thorough and is also appropriate for non-regulated alcohol testing programs. The first component of the training requires that the student be trained on the DOT rules through a 6-½ hour classroom lecture. This may be accomplished via

video or a computer-based training program, as long as the program meets the requirements of the DOT BAT model course. The second component requires the student to demonstrate proficiency in administering an alcohol test using the EBT instrument via 7 error-free mock tests. The BAT needs to understand all of the displays and messages on the device in addition to knowing what buttons to press. They have to know what to say and what to do in any number of difficult scenarios. Be wary of any trainer who claims to be able to accomplish everything mentioned in this paragraph in only 2 hours. Ask to see a detailed training agenda—you have the right to see what it is you are buying.

Training is not just a one-time event, it is a process. Keeping up with the current procedures and attending workplace related seminars will help BATs gain and maintain knowledge. DOT requires refresher training for BATs every five years. We urge our customers to exceed the DOT requirements—a proficiency training program where BATs are able to practice and document their skills on an annual or bi-annual basis will go a long way towards proving a particular BAT was competent at the time of a disputed test. ■



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