

Growing UK Drug Culture Requiring Rigorous Workplace Testing Policies

The UK's growing drugs culture is responsible for a rapid increase in the adoption of workplace drug and alcohol testing by businesses in the UK. People tend to assume drug taking is all recreational. In reality it does not start at 5pm on Friday. The workplace is a major part of a society where drugs are a daily reality.

Cocaine and cannabis are the most common drugs detected in the workplace, but there is a growing trend towards abuse of prescription medication, NPS (novel psychoactive substances) or so-called 'legal highs' and steroids which, according to experts, can trigger aggression.

Drug testing is mandatory in a number of industries, including the railway sector, but the harmful implications of letting drug and alcohol abuse go unchallenged are such that a wider selection of businesses are now opting for implementing drug and alcohol testing policies or enhancing existing policies.

Workplace drug and alcohol testing is now common across a wide range of sectors including the construction industry, where due to the high risk operational environment, extreme care has to be taken in all areas of work. Workplace drug and alcohol testing is also widely used in many other sectors including maritime, aviation, manufacturing, food-processing and logistics.

Gone are the days when employers could ignore drug and alcohol abuse. The drivers for this are more rigorous regulation including the Corporate Manslaughter Act, and a greater emphasis on health and safety in the workplace.

In order to keep staff safe and allay fears of workplace accidents, employers are proactively implementing drug and alcohol testing policies, which are usually preceded by an 'amnesty' period, allowing staff with dependencies time to address their problem ahead of being screened for the presence of drugs or alcohol.

The amnesty period allows staff to discreetly raise the issue with their employers and is a better and more pre-emptive way of dealing with the issue than for an individual's dependency to be established by the new testing policy.

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