

WorkSafe: Your industry expert

WorkSafe, Inc. offers a full spectrum of workplace drug and alcohol program services at its office on 36th and C Street in Anchorage and instant-results testing for your worksite. WorkSafe provides corporate training, drug and alcohol testing consultation services, pre-employment drug and alcohol screening, return-to-duty services and follow-up testing. It also has on-call personnel 24 hours a day if an employer's work shifts require testing availability around the clock. For more information regarding a drug-free workplace, contact WorkSafe at 907-563-8378.

WorkSafe Products & Services

Drug & Alcohol Awareness Training

Collector's Desk Reference Guide[®]

Training Videos

Program Manager's Reference Guide[®]

Breath Alcohol Technician (BAT) Training

Collection Personnel Training Course[®]

Compliance Toolbox CD

WorkSafe Contacts

To contact WorkSafe during regular office hours, call 563-8378 (TEST).
To request an after hours drug or alcohol test, call 888-227-8642.

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4

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WorkSafe

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WorkSafe

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Alaska leads nation in drug use

By Matthew Fagnani, C-SAPA, C-SI, President, WorkSafe, Inc.



When it comes to drug abuse, there's some good news and bad news. Alaska continues to have the highest rate of illicit drug use in the United States but workplace drug testing is having a positive impact on the problem.

In Alaska, past-month use of illicit substances, including marijuana, rose from 11.79 percent in 2004 to 12.16 percent in 2005, according to the recently released National Survey on Drug Use and Health, conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which is a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

On the positive side, Alaska employers continue to make significant progress in establishing drug-free workplaces, according to drug testing positivity rates. The number of non-DOT drug tests conducted by WorkSafe, Alaska's leading provider of employee screening services, grew by 13 percent last year and by nearly 46 percent since 2003. Yet the percentage of positive drug tests has stayed stable – 4.5-5 percent – during the past four years.

“Because the total number of tests is up over the past several years, we might be tempted to think the positivity rate would shrink due to a larger pool,” said Bill Current, a drug testing consultant and author of “How to Get the Most Out of Drug Testing.”

“However, the fact that the positivity rate has stayed fairly consistent from year to year indicates that drug testing is working. It's helping to identify the people who

have a drug problem and it is likely deterring a lot of people from using drugs in the first place.”

Employers must stay on the offensive

These figures from the new drug survey show:

- An estimated 8 percent of the population over the age of 12 admitted to using an illicit drug in the past month. The number for Alaska was 12.16 percent.
- 10.1 percent of Alaskans over the age of 12 admit to being current marijuana users, compared to 6.04 percent nationwide.

continued on page 2

Spring updates and reminders

Companies regulated by the U.S. Department of Transportation for the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) have requirements that mandate pre-employment testing of all new hires and anyone not maintained in a random testing program during the winter. Please contact your program manager if you have any questions.

It is also time to review your USCG anti-drug policy and make sure it is up-to-date. This spring, WorkSafe will release an updated copy of the Drug Testing Tool Box[®], which has a sample USCG anti-drug plan. It is the company's responsibility to print and edit as appropriate. If you need assistance, contact your WorkSafe program manager.

The USCG is very active in auditing. It is the responsibility of each company to keep a record of all drug test results, random test updates,



Each company is responsible for record keeping

statistical reports and any other documentation necessary to manage your drug and alcohol program.

Be sure to notify WorkSafe of all changes, terminations and new hires once they have passed the pre-hire drug test so the random program can be kept up-to-date.

Now is the time to receive your supervisor training to recognize drug and alcohol use. Call WorkSafe to schedule your training.

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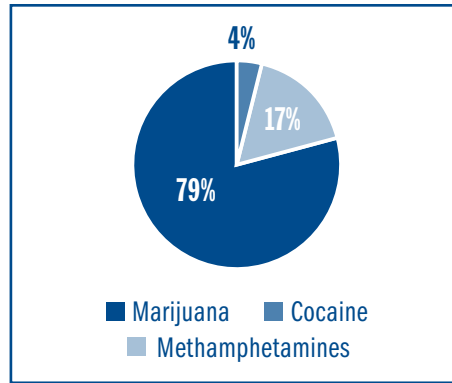
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continued from page 1

- Some 2.56 percent of Alaskans over the age of 12 used cocaine in the past year, compared to 2.3 percent nationwide.
- Nearly 5.8 percent of Alaskans over the age of 12 admitted to the non-medical use of pain relievers in the past year, compared to the national average of almost 4.8 percent. This category includes pain relievers, tranquilizers and stimulants.



WorkSafe's positivity rates over a 5-year period for all test results

Alarming numbers for those in workforce

The area where Alaska has the greatest problem is drug use among adults 26 years and older. Past-month substance abuse increased from nearly 8.8 percent to 9.8 percent, a significant jump when compared with the national average, which stayed level at 5.6 percent. Only Vermont (7.08 percent) and the District of Columbia (7.17 percent) scored anything higher than a 7.

This category represents a great concern for Alaska employers. This is a much larger pool than the other age groups, and it includes the majority of Alaska's workforce. The drug most often abused by this group is marijuana.

Marijuana is the illicit drug of choice in this state. Many more Alaskans of all ages use marijuana than their counterparts Outside, and they use it more frequently.

WorkSafe's own experience underscores these alarming statistics. Of the more than 27,000 non-DOT drug tests we conducted in 2006, nearly 4.5 percent came back positive, and that does not include tests that were canceled or occasions when a worker refused to be tested. Almost 79 percent of the positives were for marijuana, followed by about 17 percent for cocaine and 4 percent for amphetamines.

Why is Alaska so high?

Alaska may be failing its residents by not educating them about the dangers of marijuana use. The government report found that Alaskans of all ages do not worry about the negative effects of smoking marijuana. In fact, only 27.3 percent of Alaskans believe there is any possible harm in smoking marijuana, compared to 39.04 percent nationwide.

"In many respects, education remains the key," said Current. "In the workplace, drug education is a critical component of an overall program to prevent substance abuse. And it is very important that young people be exposed to information about the dangers of drug abuse as early as possible. But it is even more important that they keep hearing the message and that they hear it from the right people – their parents.

"Employers can play a significant role in helping parents gain the knowledge they need to talk to their kids about drugs. When you think about it, employers probably spend more time with America's parents than their kids do, at least during the week. The workplace is the ideal medium for providing drug education and the impact for good in doing so can be felt for generations," said Current.



Education: The best way to keep kids off drugs

Of the nearly 12,000 DOT drug tests last year, the positivity rate was almost 1.5 percent, of which marijuana accounted for 80 percent.

How WorkSafe testing compares with the nation

WorkSafe's positivity rates tend to be a little lower than one major drug-testing laboratory that processed 9 million samples in 2006.

What does it all mean? The national lab's overall positivity rate has dropped over the past few years while WorkSafe's has remained relatively flat. These findings support the federal government's report that substance abuse is down in many parts of the country but up in Alaska. Yet, the fact that the positivity rate in Alaska has remained consistent means drug-testing works.

"There's no question that marijuana use continues to be a problem throughout the United States," says testing expert Current. "But as employers conduct drug testing, those workers with a real problem tend to test positive sooner or later, and it's usually sooner when the employer conducts random drug testing. It's just a lot more difficult to escape the webbing of a random testing program."

Testing produces results

Current says more companies should share their test results because the information "is critical to the process of proving that drug testing programs work."

"The fact that WorkSafe's 2006 drug tests are consistent with previous years shows that drug users in Alaska are not getting away with anything," said Current.

"And, there's a lot at stake. When people use drugs just before starting work or while on the job, they put everyone at risk, including themselves. Many studies over

many years have shown conclusively that drug-abusing employees are less reliable, less productive and less safe than their non-using co-workers.

"The best thing employers can do is maintain a well-run drug-testing program. It sends a message that workplace drug abuse will not be tolerated. And for those who take the chance and continue using, a positive drug test result may be the wake-up call they need to turn their lives around."



Drugs put yourself and others at risk

Your safety department can positively impact the bottom line

By Michael Bell, General Manager, Commercial Solutions

Gone are the days when having a Driver Qualification File (DQF) was simply a luxury. Today, not having DOT-regulated DQFs can expose companies to large fines and legal consequences. The federal government has raised the bar extremely high with its regulations on Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) subject employees. Companies can no longer quickly throw together a file and expect to comply with a pending compliance review. Proper file management takes time and a thorough understanding of the rules. All too often an employee who has little understanding of the requirements for compliance is responsible for the management and maintenance of the files.

Compliance is difficult

The FMCSA are now so complex and constantly changing that it takes a trained

safety professional to stay informed. Large interstate companies came face-to-face with this reality when they received their first DOT compliance review. If a company escapes without a financial fine they usually have days of work to fill in the gaps in compliance before the DOT returns for a follow-up visit. Smaller intrastate companies are now going to be held to this identical standard of enforcement that tracks safety ratings.

New entrant program

The DOT now requires new companies to undergo a New Entrant Program, where newly registered companies receive a complimentary compliance review and guidelines on what they need to do to be in compliance. Too many carriers take the guidance that is given through the DOT and do little with it. The playing field is being leveled though the industry with

direct trucking companies and for companies who only use trucks to move their own materials.

Evidence of this is now surfacing with states like Alaska that are voiding their internal intrastate identification and is transitioning to an AK US number. This change has come through the MCS-150 form required by all carriers, which allows authorities to keep track of everything from weigh station violations, driver violations and record-keeping violations. Intrastate carriers will now be held to the identical standard as interstate carriers and if they compile too many violations, they will receive a visit from the DOT.

Now is a perfect time to evolve your safety department from just a cost center to a money-saving tool.

