

## **Career Builders**

By Mary-Alane Wiltse

### **Employment Drug Testing**

A growing number of employers are choosing to implement drug screening policies to insure that their workforce is not using illegal substances. Nationwide, it is estimated that over 43 percent of workers are subject to drug tests, and close to 100% of Fortune 200 companies have some sort of employee drug-testing policy. Many businesses are federally mandated to perform drug testing because of the safety-sensitive nature of the jobs performed by their workforce. Other companies do so to take advantage of state and federal financial incentives or because it is required if they want to maintain large contracts with government agencies. Basically, the larger the company the more likely they are to have some type of drug-free workplace policy, which almost always includes a drug testing component. As larger, nationwide companies move into our area, more of our local workforce is required to undergo drug testing.

As long as employers have a written policy in place and the policy treats every employee or applicant the same, based on their job categories, then companies are free to drug test. Most employers' policies tend to follow similar screening procedures: pre-hire, random post-hire, for cause, and/or after an accident.

Generally, there are two types of drug tests used by employers. One is called a "Five Screen", which tests for the following five substances: Cannabinoids (Marijuana, Hashish), Cocaine (Crack), Opiates (Heroin, Codeine), Amphetamines (Meth, Speed), and Phencyclidine (PCP, Angel Dust). The "Ten Screen" also tests for five additional drugs including Barbituates, Qualuudes, Tranquilizers, Methadone and Darvon compounds.

Most drug tests are performed using urine samples. The amount of time a drug stays in someone's system varies based on the drug and the physical condition of the individual being tested. Most illegal substances cannot be detected by a urine sample between one and four days after being ingested. The exceptions are PCP's, which can remain in the system for over a week and marijuana, which can be identified for over a month after it has been used.

Some companies are now choosing to test for illegal drug use by testing hair samples. Apparently, once a drug has been used it remains in our hair for up to four months. These tests are more expensive than urine tests, so less employers use them.

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