

# ***Drug Screening & Your Career***

Drug and alcohol screening is becoming more widespread in the selection of personnel. While too expensive to be used in pre-selection of all employees, job candidates should understand that they may be asked to take a drug test.

Questions about civil rights have surfaced but employers have established that it is within their rights to see that the workplace is free from hazards that can occur when a worker's performance is affected by drugs.

The screening may be done before or after the person is hired and, in many cases, is administered for part-time, summer, internship, and co-op employment as well as for full-time employment.

## **The Issues for Applicants:**

What should job applicants understand about this aspect of job hunting? A positive test result should not be taken lightly because it may be detrimental to your chances for employment. Re-testing done 60 days, six months, or one year later may be allowed. Some companies refuse any retest and consider an employment rejection permanent.

If you are not a drug user and you fail the drug screening be as straight forward as possible and ask that they do a confirmation test. Most employers do not automatically perform a confirmation test since it is significantly more expensive than the initial test.

## **There are several issues involved for job applicants:**

- Rejection may not be explained. Reasons for non-hire are many, and applicants may not know that a positive drug test has removed them from consideration. Thus, in the case of a false-positive, there would not even be a chance to request a retest.
- Laboratory results are not always accurate. The growth of drug testing is overloading laboratories and creating demand for new facilities that may not have established standards for accuracy.
- Over-the-counter and prescription drugs can give positive results. Cheaper tests don't discriminate. Remember that the primary purpose of drug testing is to identify abusers of substances that interfere with performance on the job, both for safety and productivity reasons. Having legal access to prescription drugs may not justify a positive result. On the other hand, the use of illegal drugs is still just that...illegal.
- A "Catch 22" situation may occur with applications that ask if the applicant has ever used drugs. Honest people who experimented lightly many years ago may have to wrestle with their conscience over whether to give a "yes" answer that could remove them from any further consideration for employment.

## **What Applicants Can Do:**

- Ask if there is going to be drug screening and why.

- Be sure that in submitting to drug screening your rights to privacy and dignity are not substantially invaded.
- Report any prescription drugs or medications taken before testing.
- Find out what type of laboratory testing is done to ensure fair and accurate procedures are in place.
- Know the company's policy on re-testing.
- Ask for reasons for employment rejection.
- Be aware that reluctance to drug screening may be interpreted negatively.

**What Applicants Should Not Do:**

- Attempt to smuggle in a drug-free sample. "Observed" testing may be used.
- Plan to dilute a urine sample at the test site. Many companies use toilet disinfectants that color the water.
- Hope that enough time has passed since your last drug usage. Learn the facts about residual differences and time spans.

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<u>Test</u>	<u>What's Involved</u>
Urinalysis-EMT	Enzyme Multiplied Immunoassay Test is the most commonly used urinalysis. Detects the presence of chemical metabolites by mixing urine with a special solution. If positive, a distinct reaction occurs.
Urinalysis-Gas Chromatography	Usually used as an alternative method to confirm a positive EMIT result. Urine is placed on a chemically treated paper that shows the presence of individual drugs in a distinct pattern and color.
Blood	Chemical Breakdown of a blood specimen to detect drugs. Costly and relatively complicated and thus not widely used.
Saliva	The active ingredient in marijuana, THC, can be detected in saliva two to eight hours after consumption.
Breath	Person exhales into a machine known as a breathalyzer, which measures percent of alcohol in the blood.
Hair	Drug use over a period of weeks or months can be profiled by tests conducted on hair. More technically difficult and not as reliable as urine testing. Can also show small traces of drugs, such as marijuana or crack cocaine, which may have been absorbed through smoke in the air, like at a party, where others have been smoking even if the person concerned has had none of the drug.
Brain Waves	By monitoring the brain's electrical charges, a test known as the Vertias 100 is purported to be able to show current impairment due to a number of drugs.

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## How Long Drugs Stay in the Urine

<u>Drug</u>	<u>Approximate Detection Time*</u>
Alcohol	12-24 hours
Amphetamines	2-4 days
Barbiturates	1 day (short acting) 2-3 weeks (long-acting)
Cocaine/Crack	12 hours – 3 days
Darvon	4-48 hours
Ecstasy	2-4 days
GHB	12-24 hours
Heroin	1-2 days
LSD	2-3 days
Marijuana	2-7 days, but up to one month for regular users
Methadone	About 3 days
Methaqualone	2 weeks
Opiates	2-4 days
PCP	2-10 days
Valium	1-5 days

- Approximations are due to variables such as drug metabolism and half-life, person's physical condition, fluid intake and method and frequency of use.

Source: TASC of Maricopa County and ISDD Drugsearch