



1014 Whispering Oak Drive, Bardstown, KY 40004
800/672-7229 – FAX 281-664-3152 www.sapaa.com

Training-International Substance Abuse Testing Programs

By Sue Clark, MBA, C-SAPA President Alpha Pro Solutions, Inc.
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Robert Bruner, CEAP, C-SI
National Substance Abuse
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C.B. Thuss, Jr., M.D.
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Mary Lynn Brown-Ybos, C-SAPA
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Drug and alcohol abuse in the workplace effect the health, safety and productivity of workers all over the world. Employers everywhere are implementing policies to prohibit substance abuse on the job.

Employers that are starting a new drug or alcohol testing program should designate a company representative to manage the program. The "Designated Employer Representative (DER)" will work closely with the legal, human resource and safety departments to construct a written company policy that outlines prohibited substances and conduct; consequences for violating the company policy; testing protocols; and in some cases employee treatment and assistance plans with return to work or termination clauses.

Training for Employers

Designated Employer Representative (DER) Training

The Designated Employer Representative (DER) should obtain training to become as familiar as possible with the A-Z's of a substance abuse program. Once a company policy has been constructed based on company objectives and local or federal guidance, then supervisors and management should be told about the new program to ensure smooth implementation of the policy.

Supervisor Drug and Alcohol Signs and Symptoms Training

Supervisors who will be responsible for intervention when they suspect an employee has violated the policy should be trained in recognizing the signs and symptoms of drug abuse and alcohol misuse. Empowering supervisors to be confident about recognizing the signs and symptoms of impairment is essential, especially when reasonable suspicion or reasonable cause testing is authorized by company policy.

Employee Drug and Alcohol Awareness Training

All employees should receive and acknowledge receipt of the company substance abuse policy. Employers should provide training, or at minimum an employee handbook, that teaches employees about the dangers of workplace drug and alcohol abuse. Employees should also be informed about how to obtain help for themselves or their coworkers when needed.

Drug and Alcohol Test Training

Once an Employer decides to implement a substance abuse policy that includes drug and/or alcohol testing, then decisions must be made about when, where, and how to test. In some cases, conducting tests at the workplace may be appropriate. If not, a testing service provider may be selected.



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Drug Test Technician Training

All drug testers should be trained in the proper collection of the hair or bodily fluid (urine, saliva, sweat or blood) to be tested. Training should include topics such as testing site integrity and security; how to reduce the possibility of drug test tampering; how to complete a testing form (custody and control form); and how to collect, inspect, and prepare the specimen for analysis.

Alcohol Test Technician Training

The Employer policy should specify the blood alcohol level (or its equivalent) that will constitute a positive alcohol test result. Alcohol tests are conducted using breath, blood, saliva and urine. The alcohol test technician must be trained in completing an alcohol testing form and conducting the test, and be proficient in the specific testing device or method utilized.

Medical Review Officer (MRO) and MRO Assistant Training

Best practice in the United States is for a qualified medical doctor to review the test results to ensure an accurate and fair test result is reported to the Employer. In some other countries an occupational health physician or an employer's occupational health department plays a role in test review. Medical Review Officers (MROs) are usually medical doctors. MROs and their staff (MRO Assistants) should be trained in the drug test process and interpretation of results so they can communicate a definitive result to the Designated Employer Representative. The MRO will usually speak directly to the employee when a test result is non-negative in order to determine whether or not the test result should be reported as a positive, substituted, adulterated, or a negative test result. When there are problems with the test, the MRO will troubleshoot the test findings and advise the Employer of a final result.

Training Conclusion

There are many ways to obtain substance abuse testing program training. Classroom training courses facilitated by experienced compliance experts and instructors are offered at regional and national industry conferences. Web-based and video-cam training can be an excellent and affordable alternative when travel to conferences is not possible. Some training courses are offered in video format on DVD or video tape.

Not all training providers and courses are alike. Be sure to select an internationally recognized training provider.

For more information about international and domestic training courses visit the website of the Substance Abuse Program Administrators Association (SAPAA) at www.sapaa.com.