Reviews

The Drug-Free Workplace: How to Get There and Stay There

by John J. Fay

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Reviewed by Douglas J. Blaine, Sr

The employed substance abuser is more prone to absenteeism, accident involvement, and lower productivity, and submits more health and workers compensation insurance, than other employees. Moreover, the link between workplace crime and violence and substance abuse is undisputed. The workplace offers optimum conditions for employed substance abusers to illicitly fund their abuse by on-site dealing or theft. Until a convergence of law and technology in the late 1980s, the employer had few resources to deal with these problems.

In 1991 the Omnibus Transportation Employee Testing Act was passed in the US. This act spelled out the procedures to be followed for the drug testing of transportation employees, including testing methods, protection of employees' rights, and the involvement of Medical Review Officers. This 'DOT Model' became the standard for workplace drug-testing procedures.

For the employer wishing to pursue a drug-free workplace and to understand the DOT model a comprehensive guide is needed. Unfortunately, this book is not such a guide; it is simplistic in approach and incomplete in instruction. When the book discusses such matters as Medical Review Officers, 'cut-off levels' and confirmations, there are no explanations as to their relevance or how they work.

Technological advances in drug testing—including hair, oral fluid, 'on-site' and sweat testing—are ignored by the book. The most promising development is the on-site or do-it-yourself screening technologies that many employers now use. The on-site devices allow an employer to perform a drug screen at the actual work location, and obtain a result five minutes after specimen collection. These capabilities dramatically lower costs, shorten reporting time, and offer a high degree of accuracy. They should be discussed in this volume, but are not.

A discussion of alcohol-testing is completely absent from the book. Because of alcohol's legitimacy and its history in the human race it is often overlooked by employers when implementing a drug-free workplace program. However, alcohol is the single most abused drug in Western culture, and for a book purporting to be a guide to implementing a drug-free workplace, this omission is inexcusable.

Throughout the book the US Departments of Transportation (DOT) and of Health and Human Services are properly cited as authorities. However, the book also cites the former's Research and Special Projects Administration (RSPA) as an authority on the shipping and processing of specimens. RSPA is but one subdivision or 'mode' of the DOT, having authority solely over the pipeline industry, just as the Federal Aviation Administration has authority only over the aviation

industry. Why the author cites RSP A as an industry-wide standard is a mystery . He further demonstrates his lack of knowledge by listing the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) as a resource. In the mid-1990s NIDA's role in workplace substance programs was replaced by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The bulk of this book is a resource guide for more information, but this too is inaccurate and outdated. Readers will do better by taking the money used to buy the book and securing a few hours of Internet access; in this way, they will get reliable and current information.

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