

CASE STUDY: Constructing Better Health

The sobering facts - why work-related drug and alcohol testing is necessary

About CBH – managing *all* risks to work-related health

Constructing Better Health's (CBH's) core objective is to champion better practices to improve construction industry employees' work-related health. This means ensuring that work-related health can be easily monitored, and managed, so that workers are not at risk of becoming ill or harming others while doing their job.

Launched in 2007, as a non-profit membership scheme, CBH have helped hundreds of businesses to navigate and understand the regulatory requirements when it comes to providing occupational health support to their employees. This comprises a wide spectrum of health issues, from musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory disease, occupational cancers to stress and of course, drugs and alcohol misuse.

Drugs and alcohol – feel good factor at great risk

Not many people would consider drugs and alcohol as work-related health risks, but they are very much so. Most people enjoy a glass or two of wine in their recreational time. Certainly most of us have had to use medication prescribed by our GPs.

In terms of occupational health, the impact of consuming either in excess or irresponsibly, can influence one's working health and life negatively. Drugs, alcohol or even prescription medication can impair judgement which can have in the worst case, fatal consequences on a construction site.

Substance misuse covers a wide range, including legal options, such as alcohol, tobacco or solvents. The illegal spectrum includes cannabis, heroin and cocaine, to name a few.

However, it is very easy to slip into the false sense of security that prescribed drugs are harmless, when in fact many can be addictive or fatal if incorrect doses are taken. Likewise, with alcohol, depending on social, environmental and emotional considerations, one recreational glass of wine in the evening could turn into a daily, high volume habit with dire consequences to health, livelihood, work and home life.

In the UK substance misuse and dependence is increasing, especially among the young. Specifically, workers in the construction industry are six times more likely to be killed at work than workers in other sectors.

CBH now provide guidance on Drug and Alcohol testing for safety critical workers

Being tough on drink and drugs use can protect and even save lives. CBH have been consulting and working with construction industry contractors regarding drug and alcohol testing procedures to ensure legal compliance with testing and managing this very important issue.

CBH define safety critical work as:

'Where the ill health of an individual may compromise their ability to undertake a task defined as safety critical, thereby posing a significant risk to health and safety of others'.

For example, testing for drugs and alcohol has been mandatory in the Railways Industry for some years. Many construction companies already undertake drug and alcohol testing to ensure that workers are safe to work on sites, and to protect members of the public from potential accidents due to any substance misuse.

Following on from extensive research and requests for guidance, CBH can now publish its recommended guidance for its members. It stipulates that, as a minimum, all construction companies/sites should have looked at the issue of drug and alcohol misuse, and work to an agreed drug and alcohol policy document per company.

Further, CBH have stipulated that safety critical workers on all construction sites undergo drug and alcohol testing in some form (according to company policy) and that the higher Railway Standard for alcohol be used as the norm for those in the construction safety critical workers' category.

Lists of safety critical job roles within the construction industry are available to view within the Industry Standards and include roles such as tunnel boring gangs and steeplejacks amongst others.

Caroline Harding, Occupational Health Manager at CBH says: "CBH fully support the construction industry with the promotion of the Standards but also updates them using evidence-based guidelines for testing. We work alongside the industry and promote the use of an accredited Drugs and Alcohol specialist through the CBH occupational health accreditation scheme. "

Any employers using CBH health risk management tools, can see results from drug and alcohol tests displayed on the CBH 'Check a Card' system, which can be checked securely via the CBH website alongside other health check results. In this way having the information secure but accessible, means that employers are better placed to give their workers the support they need with their health issue(s).

Those who pass the drug and alcohol test will have results recorded as a PASS result and those who fail will have the notation 'refer to employer' displayed for a period of three months, after which the 'refer to employer' will disappear. Sponsors of the drug and alcohol testing (those who pay for the test) will be informed of the PASS or FAIL result.

The documents below are available on the member's area of the CBH website for reference purposes and further information:

1. The Industry Standard
2. Drug and Alcohol guidance
3. Drug and Alcohol testing procedure

How CBH helps its members to improve work-related health

CBH have devised guidance, specific tools and expertise to make site-level health management an efficient reality. They provide the tools to help employers and their occupational health service providers to make work-related health management process as smooth as possible.

- CBH have set the Industry Standards for both work-related health issues, and competency of occupational health provision, to deliver the health screening and defining, safety critical workers within the construction sector.
- Access to a construction specific knowledge portal, giving consistent advice, guidance and support in the management of work-related health risks
- Development of the UK's only secure and centralised collection of work-related health data. This provides a reliable source of data to inform a 'benchmark' for industry to further improve work-related health standards
- Providing the capability to transmit health data to enable employers to manage work-related health risks at site level
- Enabling a referral route through to specialists in the field of return to work and rehabilitation

CBH undertake an accreditation process for Drug and Alcohol providers. If you would like guidance on managing drugs and alcohol misuse and testing, Contact CBH on 0345 873 7726 or info@cbhscheme.co.uk for more details.