From crisis to success: increased testing linked to workplace alcohol and substance abuse decrease

Alcohol and substance abuse is not the type of problem that waits until after working hours. It's a growing crisis with significant implications in the workplace for productivity, safety and employee well-being, particularly while people are on the clock. Many organisations have stepped up company policies, putting in place increased testing and reporting protocols to prevent, detect and manage substance abuse among their workforces. When undertaken with a proactive and preventative approach, rather than a punitive one, there is a clear correlation between the increased adoption of testing and reporting protocols, a decline in positive results, and a decrease in alcohol and substance abuse within the workplace. The result is a favourable transformation of workplace culture, fostering a healthier, safer and more productive environment while reducing alcohol and substance abuse.

A policy-based approach to crisis control

A critical step in addressing intoxicating substances in the workplace is the implementation of a written policy that clearly states the company's stance on alcohol and drug abuse and details the consequences of contravention while outlining the measures that will be taken to test and enforce the policy. In addition to investigative and disciplinary measures, companies also have a duty to educate their workforce on the dangers of substance abuse, and to offer the appropriate levels of support for employees who find themselves with a problem.

Enforcing safety: testing for alcohol and substances

In industries where intoxication poses a significant risk, regular testing using breathalysers for alcohol,

or saliva testing for chemical substances, is imperative. For logistical and cost reasons, compulsory alcohol testing of each employee at regular intervals throughout the day is more feasible than compulsory drug testing. As such, the organisation has to test for drugs according to their needs, and consistency is key to achieving the deterrent effect.

Compulsory vs random testing: unexpected results

One company examined the impact of different testing approaches for alcohol testing across their two operational sites. One site enforced compulsory testing for all employees, while the other conducted random tests. Interestingly, the site with random testing had a higher rate of positive test results despite conducting only a fraction of the tests compared to the compulsory testing site. This can be linked to the powerful deterrent effect of compulsory testing. Individuals at the compulsory testing site were aware that they would be tested every day, significantly reducing the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviour. On the other hand, the element of surprise in random testing created a sense of uncertainty among employees and while this led to a higher number of positive tests, this was not the desired outcome. The goal is always to minimise positive results, as this shows that the prevalence of alcohol and substance abuse is declining.

Technology drives intelligent intervention

Here, technology can prove to be of remarkable assistance in addressing substance abuse in the workplace. The integration of cloud technology, biometrics, and analytics capabilities that were previously not possible with testing procedures and results, such as:

Cloud-based cooperation: A cloud-based platform that enables real-time, secure data sharing is used to report, store, and make results accessible. This seamless exchange ensures that nothing falls through the cracks, even among operational sites that are spread out geographically.

Biometric identity authentication: Swift and secure identification of individuals undergoing testing with fingerprint or facial recognition saves time and ensures accurate results. Reporting plays a vital role in ensuring compliance and reducing manipulation of the testing process.

Prevention, intervention and support

In the ongoing battle against alcohol and substance abuse in the workplace, technology and increased testing play instrumental roles. By leveraging innovative solutions and a consistent approach to testing, organisations can witness a remarkable decline in such issues. The commitment to addressing alcohol and drug-related problems demonstrates a strong dedication to employee well-being, workplace safety, and business success. With the right policies, procedures and technological measures in place, organisations can foster a culture that supports prevention, intervention, and support, ensuring the measurable well-being and productivity of their workforce.