

## **WHAT HAS YOUR STAFF BEEN UP TO?**

Employees who turn up to work under the influence of alcohol or drugs not only damage their own health, but also pose a risk to the health and safety of colleagues and the productivity of your business. Introducing a testing policy could be beneficial for both your business and your staff

There was a time in the seventies when it seemed most of British industry operated from the snug of a local hostelry. A quick pint over lunch frequently turned into three and four, particularly if you were a member of the press! However, times and attitudes to arriving at work worse for wear have changed, simply because they had to. Yet staff turning up for a day's work under the influence of alcohol and, more often in this new millennia, drugs continues to be a considerable problem. And it is hurting business in the UK – badly. An estimated 12 million working are days lost annually due to absenteeism. Factor in the staggering £5 billion it is believed to cost business and it is not difficult to see the negative impact this problem has on the health of the UK economy and its population.

A quick trip across 'the pond' reveals that drug testing has become the norm rather than the exception for US companies. Around 70 per cent of the Fortune 500 in the states have been testing people pre and during employment for many years, and are now reaping the rewards. Although the UK is still lagging some way behind, more companies have recognised the benefits of testing and are looking to introduce it.

Modern Health Systems is a Shipley-based company that specialises in drug and alcohol testing in the workplace, and which is expanding its horizons in the UK thanks to an investment from Fox Hayes' Entrepreneurs' Club. The company – appropriately just a stones throw from the model mill village founded upon Sir Titus Salts' belief in abstinence – provides workplace testing kits and training on how to use them, drugs awareness raising and a consultancy service to assess and advise companies on implementing a drugs and alcohol policy.

Director Les Vasey explains: "Individuals using drugs and alcohol not only damage their own health, but ultimately the health and safety of their colleagues and your clients. Misuse can lead to lateness and absenteeism, reduced work performance and productivity, damaged customer relations and lower morale in the workforce.

"Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 employers have a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees. Knowingly allowing an employee affected by drugs or alcohol to continue working, when their behaviour places the safety of colleagues or clients at risk, could make you as their

employer liable to prosecution. Government strategy also encourages companies to have a workplace policy.

“Although drug testing has obvious advantages for transport, haulage, engineering and the petrochemical industry where safety is an issue, there is also a definite need for testing in white collar as well as blue collar industries. Cocaine is a big problem drug for the City and can have a detrimental effect on health, both physically and mentally. It can make people aggressive and there is always the potential risk of fraud to pay for an expensive habit.”

MHS provides a number of different drug testing kits; all designed to provide a high level of accuracy in compact, easy-to-use packages. Legal services and firms looking to check a candidate pre-employment can, for example, use hair testing as this provides a three-month lifestyle history. Saliva mouth swabs are an ideal solution for workplace on-site drug testing as they can provide an instant result for opiates, while alcohol screening can be undertaken using an approved breathalyser.

“The fact that we are **service led** means we can cherry pick all the latest and best technology,” says Vasey. “Depending on the drug testing method and technology used, the results can be either on-site or laboratory-based. All positive screenings require confirmation from our accredited laboratories.”

As the former area police commander at Bradford Central, one of the driving forces behind the drugs strategy for Bradford and Keighley and chief executive of Bradford Drugs Action Team, Vasey can count on many years of experience dealing with the issues of drug and alcohol misuse. This expertise, gained alongside respected figures such as former government drug tsar Keith Helliwell, has led Vasey and MHS to take a ‘whole’ approach to tackling drugs in the workplace.

He explains: “Some people think it represents ‘Big Brother’ surveillance and that we are out to catch them – it’s certainly not that. The fact is only five per cent of a workforce usually test positive for drink or drugs. Our style is to find out what companies want, assess the situation and provide them with solutions. If an employer is imaginative enough to introduce a testing policy in a positive way, educating its staff and offering counselling for those with a problem, there is every chance that your employees will be behind it. In fact it actually shows that an employer cares about the welfare of his or her workforce. If someone has a problem and you can help them through it then it is likely that person will show 100 per cent loyalty to your company.”

With the home and international market becoming tougher and more competitive by the day, a healthy and productive workforce is key to a firm’s success. Introducing drugs and alcohol testing is one way of ensuring this, and could very soon become the norm rather than the exception.

More information about Modern Health Systems Ltd can be obtained by contacting Les Vasey on: 01274 590235 [www.modernhealthsystems.com](http://www.modernhealthsystems.com)

Some facts about substance misuse in the workplace:

29 per cent of full time employees have used illegal drugs

25 per cent of registered drug users are in full time employment

48 per cent of 16-24 year olds have used drugs at some time

75 per cent of industrial accidents may be linked to the use of drugs or alcohol

Individuals who use drugs are a third less productive

Someone who uses drugs is three and a half times more likely to injure himself or herself and two and a half times more likely to be absent from work for eight days or more

Absenteeism in the workplace accounts for 12 million lost days each year