

Drug Testing May Do Little to Reduce Workers' Compensation Claims

Injury Rates, Severity, and Drug Testing Programs in Small Construction Companies

*Schofield KE, Alexander BH, Gerberich SG, and Ryan AD.
Journal of Safety Research, February 2013.*

Overview

Construction work is hazardous, and construction workers consistently rank near the top of all occupations and industries in rates of illicit drug and heavy alcohol use. Many construction contractors rely on drug testing programs as a means to reduce accidents and injuries although policies vary: firms may choose pre-employment testing, random testing, post-accident testing, testing workers suspected of being under the influence, or some combination of these. Researchers analyzed workers' compensation claims for 1,360 construction companies over a six-year period. They found that drug testing may be associated with marginally lower injury rates in this population but that the differences were not statistically significant.

Key Findings

- Drug testing programs may result in lower reported injury rates in small construction firms, including those for lost-time claims, in high-risk trades, and for frequent and major contributors to injury.
- Results were inconsistent across categories and drug-testing programs.
- Many observed rates were lower, but were often not significant or were only borderline significant.
- Variations in a drug-testing program's effect and magnitude are based upon multiple factors.
- Underreporting is a concern whenever workers' compensation data is utilized, and there was the additional potential for reduced injury reporting due to fear of testing and potential disciplinary action.
- Underlying, unmeasured differences in the baseline safety level of companies in the population must be considered.

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See abstract:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022437512001065>

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