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Drug Abuse Rise Tests Employers

Drug usage by Americans in safety sensitive jobs is continuing to rise and expand, probably driven in part by the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on the nation's frayed social fabric, and the growing legalization of psychoactive drugs, such as marijuana and hallucinogenic mushrooms.

The most recent news on the marijuana legalization front came from the U.S. House of Representatives, which voted 216 to 202 to lift federal restrictions on marijuana on April 1 – and it was no April Fools' joke, either. Although that legislation is not expected to survive its trip to the Senate, it offers a vivid glimpse of this country's changing attitudes toward the drug.

The rate of positive drug test results among America's workforce reached its highest rate last year since 2001 and was up more than 30% in the combined workforce from an all-time low in 2010-2012, according to the Drug Test Index issued each year by Quest Diagnostics, which conducts many of the workforce drug tests for the nation's employers.

The study is based on more than 11 million urine, hair and oral fluid drug test results collected between January and December 2021.

The combined U.S. workforce includes the general workforce of mostly company-policy testing by private employers as well as the federally mandated, safety-sensitive workforce, which covers federal employees and the transportation and nuclear power industries, and can include workers such as pilots,

truck drivers, train conductors and others who are regularly drug tested under federal requirements.

Overall positivity in the federally mandated, safety-sensitive workforce based on nearly 2.7 million urine drug tests stayed even year over year (2.2% in 2020 and 2021) but was 4.8% higher than 2017 (2.1% in 2017 vs. 2.2% in 2021).



In the general U.S. workforce, positivity increased 1.8% (5.5% in 2020 vs. 5.6% in 2021) and was 12% higher than in 2017 (5.0% in 2017 vs. 5.6% in 2021) and up each of the last five years.

"Our Drug Testing Index reveals several notable trends, such as increased drug positivity rates in the safety-sensitive workforce, including those performing public safety and national security jobs, as well as higher rates of positivity in individuals tested after on-the-job accidents," observed Dr. Barry Sample, who serves as Quest Diagnostics' senior science consultant.

Keith Ward, general manager and vice president of Quest Diagnostics Employer Solutions, pointed out that the new results are part of a larger picture. "Employers are wrestling with significant recruitment and retention challenges as well as with maintaining safe and engaging work environments that foster positive mental and physical wellbeing."

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He added, "Our Drug Testing Index data raises important questions about what it means to be an employer committed to employee health and safety. Eager to attract talent, employers may be tempted to lower their standards. In the process, they raise the specter of more drug-related impairment and worksite accidents that put other employees and the general public in harms' way."

Breaking Down the Data

After five years of steady declines in several drug categories, positivity rates based on urine drug tests for the federally mandated, safety-sensitive workforce increased in 2021.

Among those workers, marijuana was up 8.9% (0.79% in 2020 to 0.86% in 2021), amphetamines jumped 7.8% (0.64% in 2020 to 0.69% in 2021) and cocaine rose 5% (0.20% in 2020 to 0.21% in 2021).

"It is important for workers to know that certain employers are required to test for marijuana under federal law and if they use marijuana, they can still lose their jobs," said Dr. Sample. "People who use drugs during working hours or before work can still be impaired and dangerous to co-workers, the general public and themselves."

Positivity rates for marijuana in the general U.S. workforce, based on more than six million urine tests, continued an upward climb, increasing 8.3% (3.6% in 2020 vs. 3.9% in 2021), the highest positivity rate ever reported in the annual index.

Over the previous five years, positivity for marijuana in the general workforce increased 50% (2.6% in 2017 vs. 3.9% in 2021).

Quest also reported oral fluid test results – which generally have a shorter window of drug detection than urine, and can detect some drugs faster, in a matter of minutes vs. hours. Oral fluid collection also has the advantage of being observed, making it harder for employees to find a way to subvert the testing process, it noted.

In 2021, positivity in the general U.S. workforce based on oral fluid was 7.3% in 2021, a decline of 46.3% compared to 2020 (13.6%) and 29.8% compared to 2017 (10.4%).

Quest said the drop in oral fluid-positivity (13.6% in 2020 vs. 7.3% in 2021) was driven by a decline in the number of pre-employment tests that

included marijuana. However, for tests that included marijuana, the oral-fluid drug positivity rate for marijuana was 14.8% in 2021, up 20.3% compared to 2020 (12.3%) and 68.2% up from 8.8% in 2017.

At the same time, the positivity rate for cocaine increased 46.6% (0.58% in 2020 vs. 0.85% in 2021), its highest spike since 2006, and methamphetamine increased 26.4% (0.53% in 2020 vs. 0.67% in 2021), exhibiting year-over-year increases for the last five years.

Urine positivity rates for post-accident testing increased at a greater rate than pre-employment testing over the past five years, driven by higher positivity on post-accident tests for marijuana, cocaine and semi-synthetic opiates

Over the last five years in general U.S. workforce urine drug testing, pre-employment positivity increased 17.4% (4.6% in 2017 vs. 5.4% in 2021); while post-accident positivity increased 26% (7.7% in 2017 vs. 9.7% in 2021).

Similarly, in federally mandated, safety-sensitive workforce urine drug tests, pre-employment positivity rose 9.5% since 2017 (2.1% in 2017 vs. 2.3% in 2021), while post-accident positivity rose 41.9% (3.1% in 2017 vs. 4.4% in 2021).

In 2021, post-accident positivity compared to pre-employment positivity was 79.6% higher (9.7% vs. 5.4%) in the general workforce and 91.3% higher (4.4% vs. 2.3%) in the safety-sensitive workforce.

For the safety-sensitive workforce urine testing in 2021, post-accident positivity for marijuana, cocaine, opiates (hydrocodone and hydromorphone) and oxycodones (oxycodone and oxymorphone) was 63.6%, 119%, 257.1%, and 194.1% higher, respectively, compared to pre-employment tests.

"Drug use affecting the work environment is a complex problem that is not going away," said Jenny Burke, vice president of impairment practice, National Safety Council.

"When workers use impairing substances, it can create incidents that compromise the safety of other workers and, in some cases, the general public. Employers should have the right and ability to maintain a substance-free workplace and the use of drug testing, including oral fluid in addition to urine. NSC supports policies and procedures that ensure safe and healthy workplaces."

Retail Claims Biggest Boxes

Retailers and wholesalers are driving the trend towards larger big box warehouses, according to the commercial real estate services giant CBRE.

North American “big-box” warehouse transactions (defined as 200,000 square feet or larger) rose dramatically in 2021, intended to accommodate large amounts of merchandise to meet consumer demand and avoid future supply chain disruptions.

As retailers grappled with supply shortages in the early stages of the pandemic, new strategies emerged for hedging against future disruptions.

“The main course of action has been to increase domestic safety stock, which often requires taking more warehouse space to hold a greater amount of consumer products,” CBRE pointed out

Retailers and wholesalers catapulted to the top spot for big-box transactions, accounting for 35.8% of all activity, up considerably from 24.7% in 2020.

This dethroned 2020’s leader, ecommerce only users, which fell to third at 10.7% (down from 27.1%). Third-party logistics remained in second place, expanding its share from 25.8% to 32.2%. Transactions include leases and user sales.

“Securing large warehouses has been a key strategy for retailers to navigate supply chain constraints,” said John Morris, executive managing director and leader of CBRE’s Americas Industrial & Logistics business. “In response, retailers have increased their inventory to meet demand for both in-store purchases and increasing ecommerce sales.”

In total, big-box transactions accounted for 450 million square feet, up 29% from 350 million square feet in 2020. Vacancy rates in this category fell to a record-low 3.4%, down from 4.6% in 2020. Four major markets are tracking vacancies at less than 1%, with Los Angeles the lowest at 0.2%.

Morris explains, “With vacancy so tight, retailers need to plan several years ahead. If you need a large block of space quickly, odds are only a few, if any, will be available.”

Amazon Loses Union Election

Amazon recently lost its first union election in its long battle to avoid unionization at its Staten Island, NY, distribution facility, seen as a major defeat in its long history of remaining union free.

The company is asserting unwarranted influence was exerted by the Biden-era National Labor Relations Board during the long union campaign.



Under President Biden, the new board has taken an aggressive stance in openly promoting union interests over employers as its declared agenda.

As a result, the Amazon defeat is seen by some as the first disturbing sign of the board’s “thumb on the scale” approach to union organizing, although the Amazon situation is unique in its own way.

The final result of the vote was 2,654 in favor of joining the union vs. 2,131 opposed, from among the approximately 8,325 workers who were eligible to vote. The distribution center in Staten Island, called JFK8, is said to be Amazon’s largest in New York. Another of the company’s Staten Island facilities faces a union vote at the end of April

“We’re disappointed with the outcome of the election in Staten Island because we believe having a direct relationship with the company is best for our employees,” Amazon said.

“We’re evaluating our options, including filing objections based on the inappropriate and undue influence by the NLRB that we and others (including the National Retail Federation and U.S. Chamber of Commerce) witnessed in this election.”

Another union battle in an Amazon facility in Bessemer, Ala., remains in limbo while the NLRB reviews more than 400 ballots that were challenged by both the company and that union (different from the one in New York). In that vote held on March 30, there were a reported 993 votes cast in opposition to joining the union and 875 in favor.

ATRI Asks for Trucking Input

A major factor in the supply chain crisis is the truck driver shortage, and methods for attacking it being explored by both the industry and government are allowing younger people to drive professionally and finding ways to attracting them to the job.



The American Transportation Research Institute has launched a research effort to help answer some of the questions surrounding this effort. To that end, ATRI is

asking fleets to complete a short survey about what it takes to attract younger drivers.

“As trucking fleets continue to address workforce challenges, understanding how to tap the potential of this nation’s younger employees is critical,” said ATRI President Rebecca Brewster.

The survey is intended to quantify the industry’s experience in recruiting, training and retaining young adult employees. This survey is part of a larger study identified by ATRI’s trucking industry Research Advisory Committee as a top research priority in 2021 to examine how the industry can best integrate younger adults into trucking careers.

Fleets are asked to provide input through an online survey that will document Millennial and Gen Z involvement in the trucking industry, carrier perceptions of the DRIVE-Safe Act pilot program, and recent developments in driver apprenticeship programs. Carrier input also is being sought on employment, training and retention practices for young adults in the trucking industry, with a particular focus on young adults working as commercial drivers licensed truck drivers.

“This timely research will provide valuable guidance for cultivating an environment in which young adults can thrive in trucking careers,” according to ATRI.

The survey is due April 22 and can be found [here](#). All company information will be kept confidential.

Interest High in AI, Survey Finds

Confidence in the future application of intelligent robots used in warehouse automation at all-time high among logistics professionals, according to a survey conducted by the intelligent warehouse systems provider Covariant.

Notable findings from the survey reveal a record-level interest in artificial intelligence robotics and planned investment across material handling operations such as sortation, induction, good-to-person order picking and depalletization.

The company reported that other findings include:

- Almost half of respondents assert that intelligent robots have become smart enough to reliably run pick-and-place stations.
- Of that group, one in four say they are already using AI-powered robotics or are in the process of implementation.

Covariant also said that the main barriers to adoption fell into two major areas for the minority who indicated they have yet to try AI robotics:

- Uncertainty around ROI/lack of awareness of new commercial models such as Robot-as-a-Service (RaaS), resulting in 35% saying they are concerned implementing a solution would be too expensive.
- A noisy marketplace –16% are overwhelmed by the nuances of available solutions and the level of difficulty in assessing the differences of each one.

"Savvy logistics professionals believe the new generation of intelligent automation, AI robotics, will solve many of today's most pervasive fulfillment center challenges," observed Covariant Chief Executive Officer Peter Chen. "We've reached a critical phase of technological viability."

His said customers have found that it takes time to see the full breadth of applications. Covariant customer Ed Shapiro, director of engineering at 3PL Capacity, noted, "When getting started, it can be difficult to understand the impact AI-powered solutions could have on your unique operations."

Prism Makes Leadership Change

Prism Logistics named Jeremy Van Puffelen President, succeeding his father and the company's co-founder Jere Van Puffelen, who will continue to serve as Chairman of the Board.

“Huge congratulations to the Van Puffelen family on Jeremy Van Puffelen, taking the helm of an industry-leading third-party logistics warehouse company thanks to Jere's vision and your team leadership,” declared Paul Delp, who is president of American Chain of Warehouses Inc. as well as Lansdale Warehouse Co., based in Lansdale, Pa.



Jeremy Van Puffelen

“In 29 years, with Jere’s leadership, we’ve built an amazing regional logistics brand and we managed to double the size of the company in the last seven years,” Jeremy said.

“We look forward to matching that growth in the next seven years and continuing to build and strengthen our regional brand for at least another 29 years. While there may be some title changes, our commitment to excellence is unchanged.”

Jeremy was Prism Logistics’ vice president of business development since 2014, after serving more than 25 years in all aspects of the company, deepening his understanding of 3PL logistics, Prism’s capabilities and how to deliver excellent service to Prism’s customers.

A seasoned professional and industry leader, he also serves on the board of directors for the International Warehouse Logistics Association and is active in the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals and other supply chain management, food logistics and consumer packaged goods industry and professional organizations.

Jere commented, “It’s time for the energy and vision of new leadership for Prism, and I’m proud to have a leader with Jeremy’s experience, capabilities and character at the helm for the next chapter of growing our company. I am especially proud of the way that our executive team has

developed over the last seven years since becoming partners in the business.”

Jere is a past chairman of IWLA and served in a variety of other leadership roles in that association over the years, helping to shape its current programs and identity.



Jere Van Puffelen

He earned the IWLA’s first ever Executive Warehouse Logistics Professional (EWLP) designation in 2015, and later was honored with the IWLA Distinguished Service & Leadership Award.

He is the co-founder and past president of the Distribution Centers of America, and is a founding member and past president of the San Francisco Bay Area’s Warehouse Education and Research Council chapter. Jere was recognized by Associated Warehouses, Inc. with its annual service award, and he remains active in contributing his talents to his community and industry.

Prism also announced that Mike Mayo will continue to serve as vice president of operations and Zech Van Puffelen, as vice president of transportation and customer service.

Founded in 1993, Prism Logistics is recognized as Northern California’s best in market regional provider of warehouse logistics services. By investing over the years in its people, technology and equipment, Prism says it provides leading edge efficiency and effectiveness for the highly demanding, high-value customers it serves.

Operating 1.6 million square feet of warehousing capacity strategically located throughout Northern California with facilities in Stockton, Hayward and Sacramento, the company supports customers’ regional, national and international warehousing, transportation and 3PL management requirements.

“Prism delivers logistics innovation and operational excellence for major CPG and Food & Beverage client companies and the suppliers and partners throughout their supply chain ecosystems,” the company said.