



# American Drug Testing

*Drug-Free Workplace Programs*

Volume 1

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(843) 747-4111

## DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE ADVISOR

AN ONGOING SERIES TO PROTECT YOUR COMPANY BY HELPING TO KEEP DRUGS OUT OF YOUR WORK-

### Fact Sheet: Abuse of Prescription Pain Killers, II

#### Health Effects

Opioids act by attaching to specific proteins called opioid receptors, which are found in the brain, spinal cord and gastrointestinal tract. When opioids attach to the receptors, they can block the transmission of pain messages to the brain. They can also cause euphoria by affecting the regions of the brain that mediate what humans perceive as pleasure. Chronic use of opioids can result in a tolerance for the drugs—meaning users must continuously take higher doses to achieve the same effects they felt when they first used the drugs. Long-term use can also lead to physical dependence and addiction—the body adapts to the presence of the drug and withdrawal symptoms occur if use is reduced or stopped. Symptoms of withdrawal include restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, cold flashes with goose

bumps (hence the colloquial term, “cold turkey”) and involuntary leg movement. Of foremost concern is the potentially fatal effect that opioids can have if taken in excessive doses. Depending

*“... the potentially fatal effect that opioids can have if taken in excessive doses.”*

upon the amount of the drug taken, opioids can depress respiration—if the user overdoses, he or she will stop breathing. Opioids are also dangerous if taken in combination with other drugs. Typically they should not be used with other substances that depress the central nervous system, such as alcohol, antihistamines and barbiturates, as the combination increases the risk of the respiratory depression cited above.

Prescription opioids like OxyContin typically come in tablet form, which is how they are usually administered under a doctor’s prescription. When abused, users administer the painkillers in a number of ways including chewing the tab-

lets, crushing the tablets and snorting them, and dissolving the tablets and injecting the liquid. All of these methods dramatically speed up the release of the medication into the user’s system, increasing the potential risk of an overdose.

Data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration’s (SAMHSA) Drug Abuse Warning Network show that visits to emergency departments increased significantly from 1994 to 2001 for narcotic prescription pain relievers. Visits naming oxycodone increased by more than 352 percent, and for hydrocodone by more than 131 percent.

#### Illegal Sales of Prescription Drugs

Since prescription opioids are controlled substances requiring a prescription, a variety of illegal techniques are used to obtain the drug. Pharmacy diversion, dishonest physicians, “doctor shopping,” fraudulent prescriptions, and robbery all contribute to the presence of diverted pharmaceuticals on the illicit market. According to the DEA, illegal acts by physicians and pharmacists are the primary source of diverted. A Web analysis identified nearly 500 Web sites advertising the sale of prescription drugs. Only 6 percent of the sites required

a prescription. Source: *Drugstory.org*

For additional information, see the “client area” at [www.AmericanDrugTesting.net](http://www.AmericanDrugTesting.net) or call 843-747-4111.

**Online Supervisor Training Program**

Module: Drug-Free Workplace Supervisor Training - Level 1 Introduction

- How to recognize workplace problems related to employee use of alcohol and other drugs.
- How to intervene in problem situations.
- How to create employee self-help programs with alcohol and other drugs.
- How to protect employees.
- How to discipline in supervisory situations when necessary for the safety of the workplace.
- How to avoid enabling and common supervisor traps.

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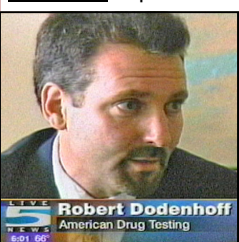
- How to identify illegal drugs and drug paraphernalia
- The linkage between drug and alcohol problems and performance problems
- How to identify and investigate crisis situations
- How to recognize workplace problems related to employee use of alcohol and drugs
- How to avoid enabling and common supervisor traps



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#### The Drug-Free Workplace Advisor



Robert Dodenhoff, President  
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