

# Hidden in plain sight: Drugs of abuse in the workplace

## The problem, the challenges and the novel SwabTek® solution

### Background

Traditionally, drug prevention in U.S. workplaces has always centered on the direct testing of employees, while the testing of substances and surfaces has been limited. In recent years, however, with many states legalizing marijuana and companies relaxing previously established standards around drug use, the landscape of managing a drug-free workplace has changed dramatically. In particular, the advent of novel delivery methods of both legal and illegal drugs has made it more difficult to identify narcotics. These easily disguised or concealed paraphernalia — such as vape pens, edibles, counterfeit OTC pills, and drug-infused products like creams, oils, gels and paper — have contributed to an alarming rise in incidents of drug use in the workplace, in organizations of all sizes, across all industries. But what is most alarming of all is that employers face a greater challenge with these new paraphernalia: When they encounter disguised or concealed drugs in the workplace, how will they recognize them?

Until recently, when managers or security personnel encountered drugs in the workplace, it was simple to identify the substance, classify it as contraband and proceed as per policy. Now, with delivery methods that are easily concealed or disguised, it can be difficult or even impossible to identify drugs for what they are, based on visuals alone. This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that there is typically no process or procedure in place to refer to when handling narcotics that cannot be properly identified.

This problem is particularly acute for several industry markets with large workforces and a lack of direct supervision, including manufacturing, trucking, warehousing, fulfillment centers, retail, construction and corrections. Loss prevention staff, security/safety officers and human resource professionals are being inundated with suspected drugs and paraphernalia on their premises, without clarity on how to address the problem.

According to the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health conducted by SAMHSA, 7.5% of respondents with full-time employment reported drug use disorder over the past year, with the number

jumping to 10.9% of respondents with part-time employment.<sup>1</sup>

With so many new varieties of narcotics, delivered by new methods, the problem of drugs in the workplace has become more prevalent, with companies scrambling for solutions to address new questions: What do you do with suspicious substances or suspected paraphernalia when you cannot identify them as drugs? What happens when you encounter what might be drugs in a workspace, in a personal locker or on company property such as a corporate vehicle? What steps can you take to quickly distinguish drug paraphernalia from innocuous personal belongings?

### Conventional solutions for drug identification

At present, there are few alternatives for employers when they encounter suspected drugs or paraphernalia at work — particularly if the drugs cannot be identified visually. Each of these options is examined in detail below.

- **Ignore the possible threat:** Without a method for identifying the suspected drug sample, employers may choose to ignore the situation entirely. This may be the only solution available for employers who are not equipped to identify the sample themselves, are for whatever reason unable or unwilling to enlist third-party assistance and are not comfortable with acting based upon suspicion alone. This alternative may expose employees to undue risk and may allow potential drug abuse and workplace safety issues to persist.
- **Confiscate and dispose of suspected drug:** Some employers may choose to proceed with action based on suspicion alone. This action will typically be characterized by confiscation or seizure of the suspected drug sample/paraphernalia and referral to the human resources department or another action based on drug policy. Although this solution is proactive and helps mitigate any risks when there is drug abuse in the workplace, it may be difficult for employers to justify disciplinary or punitive actions that are not based on reasonable evidence or due process.



- **Contact law enforcement:** Law enforcement professionals can be contacted to identify the suspicious substance. Depending on the nature of the sample itself, law enforcement may be able to spot test the substance or may need to seize the substance/paraphernalia to send it away to a lab. This solution poses many problems for employers. Many companies have concerns about involving the legal system in their operations, particularly if the involvement is based only on suspicion alone. In addition, involving the police increases the possibility that the situation becomes public. Companies may shy away from this solution for fear that internal matters become public knowledge and that as a result, they themselves may face questions regarding workplace safety and employee safety, rights and privacy.
- **Refer to a laboratory for third-party analysis:** The employer can arrange to send the suspected drug sample/paraphernalia to a laboratory for analysis. This alternative does provide a definitive result, which would allow the company to pursue internal or legal resolutions to the problem. However, this solution has limitations. For many employers, the cost to send away the sample is prohibitively expensive, especially if encountering suspected paraphernalia is commonplace. In addition, the length of time it takes for labs to process and return results may leave employers and employees in limbo for extended periods of time and leave them vulnerable to the possibility of continued workplace drug abuse in the interim.

### SwabTek: A novel solution

SwabTek provides a simple and safe solution that enables employers to address the issue of suspected drug samples and paraphernalia directly and efficiently with inexpensive narcotics detection tests that produce results for identifying drugs in seconds.

This new technology provides a unique alternative for employers: identify substances paraphernalia on-site, instantly and without third-party involvement. This capability can be applied to encounters with suspected drug samples and paraphernalia, as well as to routine screenings of employee belongings, where applicable.

On-site detection helps inform decisive and evidence-based action on the part of employers to keep employees safe while upholding drug policy. Once employers have the test results, they may then proceed with the right next steps to either handle the matter internally or refer to law enforcement, as appropriate.



The SwabTek® solution provides a host of benefits:

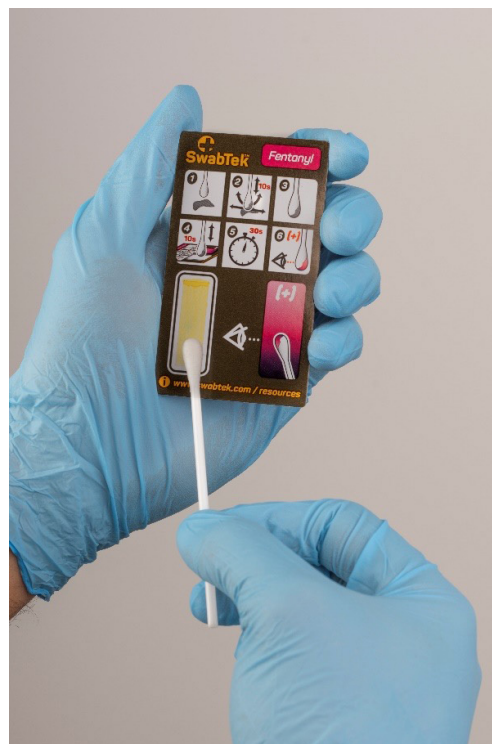
- The tests are light and cost-effective and can be easily and safely stored long term until needed.
- The tests are simple and safe; users can be trained to use the kits in less than 15 minutes.
- The tests produce instant and decisive results, allowing the company to take informed action in addressing cases of drugs in the workplace, as per policy.
- Positive test results qualify as probable cause for investigating drug policy violations, allowing employers to address employees directly, within the scope of company policy.
- The company can maintain internal control over proceedings following a positive detection and lead incidents to the preferred outcome.
- Even without linking a positive detection to a particular employee, company-wide messaging following a positive result may be valuable as a deterrent.
- In the case of a negative result, employers avoid the sensitive and often costly process of investigating and escalating a false accusation.

## Conclusion

The issue of encountering drugs and paraphernalia in the workplace has always existed but has become more prevalent in recent years. Following conventional practices for handling such matters, employers have been forced to make concessions to resolve these issues — jeopardizing employee safety, employee rights or the employer’s own autonomy in resolving workplace drug infractions.

With so many new opportunities for dangerous drugs to find their way into the workplace, employers are realizing that this issue cannot go unaddressed. Workplace safety and liability are being compromised, and conventional solutions are not sufficient.

Now, SwabTek®’s narcotics detection technology empowers employers with real-time data and the ability to make informed decisions in-house. The benefits of this novel solution make for workplace environments that are safe and drug-free, while allowing the employer to manage the enforcement of its own drug policy. This control over drug-related matters helps encourage healthy and mutually beneficial outcomes for companies and their employees.



1 SAMHSA. 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) Releases. [webpage].

## SwabTek® product catalog

| Product                             | Catalog number | Test kits per package |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| SwabTek® Cannabis Test Kit          | NTK-CAN-25-01  | 25                    |
| SwabTek® Cocaine Test Kit           | NTK-COC-25-00  | 25                    |
| SwabTek® Heroin Test Kit            | NTK-HER-25-00  | 25                    |
| SwabTek® Fentanyl+ Test Kit         | NTK-FEN-25-00  | 25                    |
| SwabTek® General Narcotics Test Kit | NTK-GEN-25-00  | 25                    |
| SwabTek® Narcotics Go Bags          | NTK-GO-60-00   | 60 test kits/Go Bag   |
| SwabTek® THC Test Kit*              | NTK-THC-25-00  | 25                    |
| SwabTek® THC Test Kit heater        | ACC-THC-HTR-00 | Single unit           |

\*SwabTek®’s THC Test Kit requires the use of a heating implement which is sold separately.

Additional configurations may be available in larger quantities. Contact your OraSure account manager to learn more.

To order, contact OraSure at 1-800-672-7873 or [customer@orasure.com](mailto:customer@orasure.com).

[www.orasure.com](http://www.orasure.com)



OraSure Technologies

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