

## The Best Practices Are Basic Practices

If you are a labor-management cooperative that supports the union electrical construction industry, you may administer a drug and alcohol testing program for a workforce that exceeds 2,000 workers and 100 employers. Workers and contractors may be spread across numerous job sites and hundreds of miles. Managing workers and contractors spread across numerous job sites and hundreds of miles requires a daily commitment to several basic practices.

This calls for a great amount of time and talent focusing on drug and alcohol testing, both because this is a basic and vital element to help ensure worker and job site safety and because of the high degree of complexity, pace and volume of drug testing.

Daily interaction is essential with current workers who are due to test, new workers who are new to this type of testing and, infrequently workers who are in the remediation process after a violation has occurred. Interaction with employers is needed to make sure that their workers are in compliance, to address any policy questions and for provider overall program metrics to support bid opportunities. That means there are a lot of moving parts including workers who report to a job site rather than an office and employers who rely on mobile devices for information needs.

Rather than staff all the professions and skill sets required to implement the drug testing program, it works well to contract several key partners in order to execute this program efficiently, effectively and affordably. Each partner brings a distinct and essential expertise to the equation. Every effort is made to minimize duplication and to be informed of worker test status at all times. This type of partner arrangement can lead to fluid dynamics in a program that serves a geographically dispersed workforce and mobile employer base.

While most might think that the latest technology such as cloud storage, online data access via mobile devices and program metrics are at the top of the list of best practices for our program, they are not. There is no doubt that these are essential tools. However, the real best practices are time-tested values that can be part of any organization's culture. Respect, communication and trust are the values brought to the program, the workforce and employers served and the partners involved to fulfill this program.

Start by respecting the workforce and employers and communicate at times and in ways that meet their work lives. Workers have rigorous and demanding jobs. Because their specialty is electrical construction, the jobs are physical, must be done in diverse weather conditions and require much expertise. Electrical construction is often described as the "central nervous system" of a structure; it takes smart, highly skilled people who can work hard in demanding conditions. Workers are often not in an office with a phone or at a computer to gather drug test information.



Everyone should understand that taking a drug test is a periodic requirement but not something workers are overly familiar with or fond of. If workers have questions or need additional information, they typically have to call before or after their workday. That means taking calls from workers before and after the typical office workday is part of the drill. When workers call, it is best to answer promptly, give them the information they need to reassure them and do the needed research to answer their questions fully and promptly. These interactions always need to be professional and courteous. The same is true for the employers served in this program; their workdays start early and end late. Their core business is electrical construction. They need to know they can rely on you to make sure their workers are tested and up-to-date. They also regularly request essential program metrics and program certification that can be required as part of a bid process. Often they have short timelines and quick response is needed. The goal is to make sure that a worker does not miss work because of the drug testing program. The commitment is just as strong to make sure each contractor has the information they need to submit bids that address all bid requirements.

In addition, the drug and alcohol testing program, industry and community relations, business advancement and workforce development are critical organizational functions. Currently there are several sizeable construction projects that have been announced or are just now underway. They range from large power plants, hospitals, university facilities, corporate

headquarters and advanced manufacturers. Often these major construction customers are asked to describe the key criteria used to award a bid. Most state that factors such as project cost and bidder's adherence to state, federal and industry regulations are actually baseline items. The essential factor that always rises to the top is trust. Can the bidder do the work? How did the bidder perform on previous projects? How does the bidder interact with other professionals on the project? How will the bidder respond to challenges, changes and opportunities? These are the typical questions asked in order to gauge trust.

These are also the critical questions to ask as you evaluate partners for your drug testing program to maximize the expertise of a Third Party Administrator (TPA) and other vendors. Of course, choice companies, meet the basic cost and regulatory guidelines. But they also operate with the same values of respect and communication. They provide collection site options across the needed geography rather than require that all tests be done in one central location. Many of these collection sites have early morning, evening and weekend hours so that a worker can test on the way to or from work or on the weekend if needed. They have an incredible team assigned to our program lead by a team leader. The team member is fully versed in our specific drug testing policy and is equally proficient with owner-mandated programs that can impose additional test requirements for workers and employers. Often workers need to schedule and test within just a few hours' notice to the team at a remote collection site. Because construction volume is increasing, more workers are going back to work. That means one of their first stops is a drug test. The TPA should work hard to make this an easy task for that worker. Due to the federal and industry guidelines that govern, technology is essential. The test and result process timeline is quick, confidential and thorough. In most cases, results are known and uploaded to an industry accessible website within 36 hours. And, due to the nature of the program, email is the standard communication tool; however, there are times that a phone conversation is needed. Still, there are periodic times to rise above the daily program activity to meet with partners to share program metrics and connect on any trends within the market and in the drug testing industry at large.

A highly functioning TPA and program manager can take drug testing program accountability and results reporting to a new level. Appreciate the time and energy it takes for each employee to test and each employer to adhere to the drug testing requirements for their workforce. Know that each test matters in order to provide a highly skilled and drug-free worker. ■

Quality Connection is a labor-management partnership between the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) #481 and the Central Indiana Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA). The unique business relationship spans more than 50 years and represents a strong tradition of quality electrical construction, progressive labor negotiations and community service. With an unprecedented commitment to workforce training, job safety and worker standards, Quality Connection...Quality Work, Customer Connected. Visit [www.qc-indy.com](http://www.qc-indy.com)

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