



ORAL FLUID: MAKING THE SWITCH

BY ANDREW CURRENT

Because of the nature of oral fluid drug testing, collection costs are often eliminated.

As society's stance on drugs has loosened, impairment has become a pressing safety concern. This is true everywhere, from the workplace to the roadways, in the United States and abroad. For example, Canada's legalization of marijuana made headlines and the rollout has created new issues for local police who have to contend with drivers under the influence of drugs. The response has been new roadside screening procedures. The approved method is oral fluid testing.¹

"I got trained on how to use the oral fluids screening device. The device itself tests for THC, which is the impairing component in marijuana," said a local policewoman.²

The need for screening on the roadside is not a new development, but one that is becoming the norm when police departments in the United States contemplate how to combat individuals driving while under the influence. For example, Michigan state police have also turned to oral fluid testing to detect individuals that are under the influence.³ The National Transportation Safety Board, the government agency charged with investigating transportation accidents, has also endorsed oral fluid testing as the best option to respond to the marijuana epidemic.⁴

The same benefits apply to the workplace and begs the question: Why should employers make the switch to oral fluid drug testing?

Effectiveness and Cost

Oral fluid drug testing offers a snapshot of an individual's drug use within 15 minutes of substance ingestion. It should be noted that many drug users consume orally. If the suspicion is that an individual is high on the job, then knowing what they have had in their mouth is a good indicator. Additionally, the bloodstream distributes drugs throughout the body within minutes, spreading drug metabolites throughout the body and into an individual's oral fluids. Again, if someone has used recently, regardless of method of ingestion, it will end up in their mouth. What is more, oral fluid testing comes up positive more often than urine. According to one recent study, oral fluid positivity rates are two times higher than those of urine.⁵

Because of the nature of oral fluid drug testing, collection costs are often eliminated. This is because oral fluid, even lab-based, can be easily and reliably collected with basic training by company personnel. The individual being tested simply swabs the inside of his or her mouth. The person overseeing the collection then takes the swab, snaps it into its collection casing, seals it, and send it to the lab. This eliminates the traditional step of finding a collection facility, making an appointment, sending employees/applicants, waiting around for the individual to produce a urine sample, etc. As such, oral fluid drug testing is less expensive, in addition to more effective, than traditional drug testing methods.

This information is provided for educational purposes only. Reader retains full responsibility for the use of the information contained herein.

Making the Switch

Once an employer understands the benefits of oral fluid, switching is simple. Most of the components of the existing drug testing program stay in place. The main steps are this:

1 IDENTIFY DRUG TESTING OBJECTIVES.

Will oral fluid testing replace all testing? Random testing? Post-accident? Or act as an additional testing specimen? Identifying exactly what the workplace needs will determine the extent to which oral fluid is implemented.

2 UPDATE THE POLICY.

Many state laws require written policies before testing can be conducted. Even where this is not a legal requirement, it is a best practice that should not be ignored.

3 CONTRACT FOR SERVICES.

Contact your sales representative or account manager to add oral fluid testing to your contract and place an order for devices.

4 TRAIN SUPERVISORS.

Since collections are so easy, it makes sense to have supervisors do them. Training for oral fluid collections can be done online and is available 24/7/365.

5 ANNOUNCE THE NEW PROGRAM TO EMPLOYEES.

Provide employees with an updated copy of the drug testing policy and provide a forum to answer any questions about the change.



Conclusion

Drug testing remains an important part of an employer's assessment and workplace safety toolkit. As the acceptance of drug use creeps into society, oral fluid drug testing provides a practical solution for detecting recent drug use. Making the switch is painless and provides proven results.

**6.3 million
employees
under the influence**
Do they work for you?



OraSure Technologies

Approximate number based on 2016 data for civilian noninstitutional population. Quest Diagnostics, Drug Testing Index, Spring 2018 and Bureau of Labor Statistics, The Economics Daily, 2016.

1. Kyle Greenham, *Officer says RCMP prepared to tackle cannabis-impaired driving, despite delay in response*, The Telegram, Feb. 15, 2019, <https://www.thetelegram.com/news/officer-says-rcmp-prepared-to-tackle-cannabis-impaired-driving-despite-delay-in-response-284827/>.
2. Anastasiia Bykhuovskais, *No way to get away: new equipment to test for drug impaired driving is now in Estevan*, Estevan Mercury, Jan. 17, 2019, <https://www.estevanmercury.ca/news/no-way-to-get-away-new-equipment-to-test-for-drug-impaired-driving-is-now-in-estevan-1.23603128>.
3. Amy Biolchini, *Roadside drug testing pilot won't be complete until after November election*, M Live, Sep. 25, 2018, https://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2018/09/roadside_drug_testing_pilot_wo.html.
4. Ryan Beene, *As States Legalize Pot, Safety Officials Sound the Alarm on Impaired Driving*, Bloomberg, Oct. 16, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-16/as-states-legalize-pot-warnings-issued-on-drug-impaired-driving>.
5. *Compare Positivity by Testing Category—Oral Fluid Drug Tests for U.S. General Workforce (finding a positivity rate for oral fluid just over 10% in 2017) with Annual Positivity Rates—Urine Drug Tests for Combined U.S. Workforce (finding a positivity rate for urine just over 5% in 2017)*, Quest Diagnostics, Drug Testing Index.

©2010-2019 The Current Consulting Group, LLC – No portion of this article may be reproduced, retransmitted, posted on a website, or used in any manner without the written consent of the Current Consulting Group, LLC. When permission is granted to reproduce this article in any way, full attribution to the author and copyright holder are required.