

quality control process revealed that the drug-testing program was 100% accurate (zero false positives and false negatives). Ten percent of applicants tested positive for drug use (for the purposes of the study, applicants were hired without regard to their test scores). Of those positive tests, 65% were for marijuana, 24% were for cocaine, and 11% were for other drugs. The evaluation revealed higher absenteeism for drug users and higher dismissal rates for cocaine users. Drug use was not related to accidents or injuries. A cost-benefit analysis suggested that full implementation of the program would save the Postal Service several million dollars per year in lower absenteeism and turnover rates.

The validity of performance and psychological drug tests is not well established. As with integrity tests, a major concern is faking, but an advantage of psychological drug tests is that applicants are likely to perceive them as less intrusive. Of those organizations that drug test, few rely on physical or psychological tests.

In considering the validity of drug tests, one should not assume that the logical criterion against which the tests are validated is job performance. Typically, the criterion of job performance is central to evaluating the validity of most selection measures, yet drug tests have not been validated against job performance. Thus, it is far from clear that drug tests do a good job of discerning good performers from poor performers. Drug tests do appear to predict other work behaviors, however, including absenteeism, accidents, and other counterproductive behavior. For the purposes for which they are suited, then, validity of drug tests can be concluded to be high.

Finally, as with other assessment methods, two other criteria against which drug testing should be evaluated are adverse impact and applicant reactions. The adverse impact of drug testing is not universally accepted, but the Postal Service study indicated that drug-testing programs have a moderate to high degree of adverse impact against black and Hispanic applicants. Research on applicant reactions to drug tests shows that if applicants perceive a need for drug testing, they are more likely to find such a program acceptable.¹⁴¹ Thus, organizations that do a good job explaining the reasons for the tests to applicants are more likely to find that applicants react favorably to the program.

Recommendations for Effective Drug-Testing Programs

Though drug testing may have peaked, it is likely to continue as one of the most commonly used selection methods, especially among large employers. In an effort to make organizations' drug-testing programs as accurate and effective as possible, six recommendations are outlined as follows:

1. Emphasize drug testing in safety-sensitive jobs as well as in positions where the link between substance abuse and negative outcomes (e.g., as was the case with the Postal Service study described earlier) has been documented.
2. Use only reputable testing laboratories, and ensure that strict chain of custody is maintained.