

Collection: the most important component of employment drug testing in the United States

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Introduction

In the United States, there are a great number of documents to assist with the drug screen collection process. Of particular relevance are the *Urine Drug Screen Collection Guidelines* and *49 CFR (Certified Federal Register) Part 40*. These two documents provide an extremely thorough compendium of drug testing collection procedures. With these documents *in situ* you may think that drug testing is a perfectly evolved system. In a perfect world that would be true, but that is not the world we live in. This article reports the perspective of collection in relation to the collector, the employer and the general public.

Collectors and the challenges they face

Collectors control a quintessential component of the drug testing process – the acquisition of the sample – and play an important role in keeping our public safe. The samples that a collector may be acquiring this very morning could be those of a school bus driver driving your child this afternoon, a pilot flying you on your next vacation or business trip, a boat pilot of your dream cruise, or your city bus driver on your regular route to work.

Through vigilance and steadfastness collectors protect both the public's safety and the donor's right to a fair and accurate drug test. The livelihood of a donor is often in the collector's hands and within this nexus the magnitude of the collector's responsibility is marked. Protecting the integrity of the specimen and protecting the integrity of the collection accomplishes two paramount goals: safeguarding the public and protecting the donor by way of conducting reliable tests.

Some donors may be very knowledgeable about the collection process and predisposed to disrupt the test with an aim to have the result annulled. It is prudent therefore that the collector assume the position of a recalcitrant donor. Just as the motive of the collector is to identify cheating donors, there may be a reciprocal motive for the donor to avoid being caught. Some donors may have more experience of the test as a benefactor than the collectors themselves.

There are many challenges that face a site collector: dealing with uncooperative, surly or even hostile donors, union or corporate intervention, etc. There are particular nuances to the obtaining of samples at the employer's site that make the collection process in this environment particularly challenging. Unlike a clinic or other collection facility, where the environment is somewhat controlled, a mobile collector can face an almost unlimited number of unusual situations. In these situations the mobile collector's greatest challenge is the preparedness to maintain a

secure collection environment that adheres to the regulations under any circumstances. If the collector is not prepared ahead of time, having reviewed all of the possible scenarios, the potential for procedural mistakes will be maximized. Heading to a collection with the mindset of, 'I'll figure it out when I get there', is heading for disaster.

Being prepared

It is important that collectors familiarize themselves with securing different collection environments, multi-stall, urinals, tankless toilets, motion-activated sinks, non-removable soap dispensers, etc., and to maintain a fully stocked collection kit that is prepared for a multitude of eventualities. Practicing the securing procedure in a variety of collection environments is paramount for developing the adequate tools for a complete collection kit.

Distraction and error occurs where the collector is situated among unusual circumstances. In such cases, not only are they more likely to make errors, in both procedural and bureaucratic matters, but they are far more likely to miss something that will give a donor the opportunity to influence the test. It is important to network with other collectors and survey with them the difficult situations that have been encountered, how these circumstances have been remedied, and what may have been performed better or differently. Learn from the experience of others at every opportunity.

The best advice for collectors is to know the regulations, practice the process, and to disentangle oneself from the idea that the collector is the only person at the site who is familiar with the proper sampling procedures. If the donor happens to be a drug user, they may have taken the time to learn the collector's job at least as well. If they have a positive test result, any mistakes in the collection procedure may be used to dispute the test.

Employing a collector

Collectors play an invaluable role in the employer's safety program. As such, employers should perform due diligence when hiring a collector/breath alcohol technician for a drug testing program making sure that they are familiar with the *Urine Drug Screen Collection Guidelines* and the mechanics of the collection process.

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If employers have the opportunity, it is encouraged that they visit the collection site and have the collector perform a mock collection. Many collection sites do not give the non-DOT (Department of Transportation) testing the same handling as DOT (no bluing of the toilet water, no door reconnaissance to listen for the cheating donor and no limit on drinking water). No limitation on the donor's consumption of water is a common mistake providing drug users with an opportunity to affect the test by diluting the sample. Some collection facilities do not follow proper shy bladder procedures, and may defer a non-DOT donor to a later date if they are unable to provide a sample.

Support your workplace and school drug and alcohol programs educate yourself about the illegal products on the narcotic

landscape, and learn what you can do to promote safe, drug-free workplaces, schools and communities. Drug testing programs are safety programs and may very well be protecting the safety of you or your family.

For more information:

www.SAPAA.com – Education for Employers/Collectors/Service Agents

www.dot.gov/ost/dapc - US Government Office of Drug and Alcohol Policy

www.drugfree.org – Parents/Community resource for information

www.samsha.gov – Employers/Service agents/Community