

Look Inside for Details

By Angelo M. Valente

Drug Trends Increase for the First Time in 10 Years

 Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey

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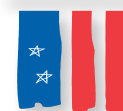
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UPDATE



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With both Washington State and Colorado now legalizing the recreational use of marijuana, businesses throughout the country are beginning to ask many questions as to how this change may impact the workforce.

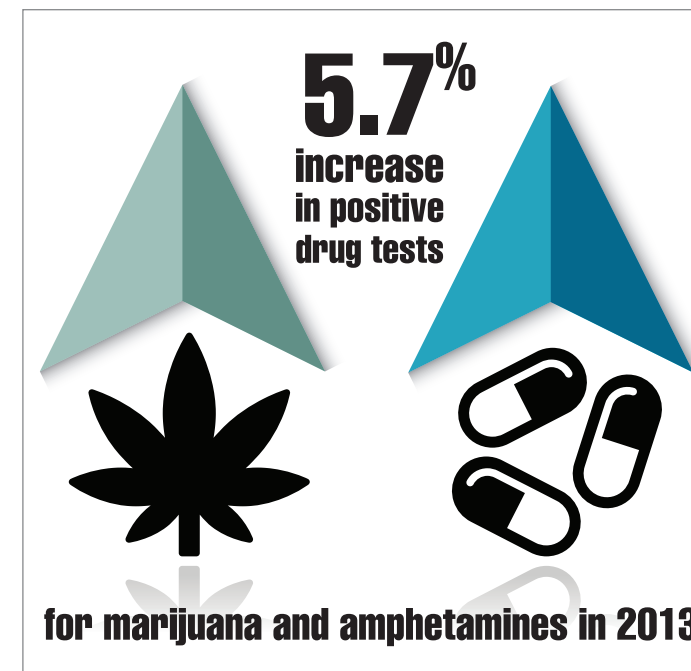
According to a new study recently released by Quest Diagnostics, there has been an astounding 5.7 percent increase in positive drug tests for marijuana and amphetamines in 2013. This is the first time since 2003 that the positivity rate for workplace drug tests has increased.

TABLE 1. ANNUAL POSITIVITY RATES – URINE DRUG TESTS

YEAR	Drug Positive Rate
2004	4.5%
2005	4.1%
2006	3.8%
2007	3.8%
2008	3.6%
2009	3.6%
2010	3.5%
2011	3.5%
2012	3.5%
2013	3.7%

(For Combined U.S. Workforce)
More than 7.6 million tests from January to December 2013

Dr. Barry Sample, the Director of Science and Technology for Quest Diagnostics Employer Solutions warns: "This increase indicates that employers should be aware of the potential for drug use by their workers and the risk that represents for the health and safety of their employees and the public."



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The study also details that, nationally, marijuana continues to be the most abused drug, with a positivity rate increase of 6.2 in a year. What is even more frightening, the positivity rate increased 5% in safety-sensitive work places.

This study is showing a clear lowering of risk perception when it comes to marijuana on a national stage. But what about states in which the drug has been legalized? It should come as now surprise that that in 2009 to 2010, Colorado saw a dramatic 22 percent increase in positive tests drug tests for marijuana and an 3% increase from 2011 to 2012. Interestingly, Washington state saw a 10% decline in positivity rate from 2009 to 2010 but bounced right back up the following year with in 8% increase.

Why is this increase happening?

Dr. Sample speculates that: “It is possible that relaxed societal views of marijuana use in those two states, relative to others, may in part be responsible for the recent increase in positivity...Washington and Colorado are believed by many to foreshadow future trends in ‘recreational’ marijuana use.”

The Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey has long since been aware of the affects of a low perception of risks when it comes to substance abuse. When talk of legalizing marijuana became a part of our public discourse, PDFNJ, along with many of our treatment and prevention partners through New Jersey, became concerned that increased conversation about making recreational marijuana usage a legal activity would

decrease the perception of risk in our state’s youth and young adults.

Monitoring the Future is an ongoing study that focuses on the behaviors and attitudes of students across the United States with regards to substance abuse. According to the Monitoring the Future 2013 Overview, the perceived risk of marijuana use is already on the decline in our nation’s youth. Since 2004, the perceived risk of marijuana has fallen dramatically in 8th and 12th grades students and continued declining in 2012 and 2013, all the while, marijuana use has steadily increased in that timeframe.

Marijuana, from a federal perspective, is still a schedule I controlled substance and, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration Office of Diversion Control, it “currently has no accepted medical use in the United States, a lack of accepted safety for use under medical supervision, and a high potential abuse.” According to the National Institute of Drug Abuse, marijuana smoke is an irritant to the lungs and frequent users of marijuana can experience the same sort of maladies that affect tobacco smokers. In addition, marijuana use has been associated with depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and lack of motivation. Perhaps the most commonly known and most important side effect is the decrease in reaction time and inability to use sound judgment.

In a recent article on NJ.com, the medical marijuana issue came front and center, as a Princeton University employee

was told to either give up participating in New Jersey’s medical marijuana program or lose his job. Despite being prescribed a low-THC strain of medicinal marijuana, Princeton University Vice President of Human Resources, Lianne Sullivan-Crowley said the University would consider the employee’s request, but also released the following statement:

“The law seems to support an employer’s right to maintain a drug-free workplace, including prohibiting the use of marijuana during work hours as well as working while under the influence of marijuana...In addition, there are other legal obligations of the university that would impact whether a particular accommodation would be reasonable.” (Davis, 2014)

However, the increase in positive marijuana tests are merely the tip of the iceberg. According to a report by CNBC, in another study, conducted by Mashable.com and SurveyMonkey and released on September 18 of this year, it was reported that nearly 1 out of every 10 Americans report to work under the influence of marijuana. In addition, a staggering 81% confirmed they had acquired the drug illegally.

It is becoming clearer everyday that a lower perception of risk when it comes to marijuana is leading to an increase in usage. Take this opportunity to reevaluate your Drug-Free Workplace policy and reiterate it to your employees. A Drug-Free workforce is an efficient, safe, and healthy workforce.

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POSITIVITY RATES BY TESTING CATEGORY – Urine Drug Tests					
Testing Category	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Federally Mandated, Safety-Sensitive Workforce	1.5%	1.5%	1.7%	1.6%	1.7%
General U.S. Workforce	4.2%	4.2%	4.1%	4.1%	4.3%
Combined U.S. Workforce	3.6%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	3.7%

POSITIVITY RATES BY TESTING REASON – Urine Drug Tests					
Testing Reason	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Follow-Up	2.5%	2.4%	2.8%	2.8%	3.0%
For Cause	11.1%	9.7%	7.5%	8.5%	9.3%
Periodic	0.80%	1.0%	1.6%	1.5%	1.3%
Post-Accident	2.2%	2.2%	2.3%	2.4%	2.5%
Pre-Employment	1.5%	1.6%	1.8%	1.7%	1.8%
Random	1.4%	1.4%	1.5%	1.4%	1.5%
Returned to Duty	3.0%	3.3%	2.5%	2.7%	2.8%

Data from Quest Diagnostics, 2014



(For Federally-Mandated, Safety-Sensitive Workforce)
More than 1.9 million tests from January to December 2013

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angelo M. Valente, Executive Director, Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey
Angelo M. Valente has been the Executive Director of the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey, since its inception in 1992, and has led this organization in becoming the largest continuous Public Service Campaign in New Jersey’s history.

In 2009, Mr. Valente was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of the American Medicine Chest Challenge (AMCC), a national public health initiative to raise awareness of the issue of prescription drug abuse and maintain a National Directory of Permanent Prescription Drug Collection sites. AMCC services over 1,000 community and law enforcement partners in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and three Indian Nations.

Mr. Valente and the Partnership have been recognized by the White House Office of National Drug-Control Policy, the Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America, the Partnership at Drugfree.org, and the National Association of Government Communicators for their creative and innovative substance abuse prevention campaigns and initiatives.

He serves as a member of the Holy See’s Delegation to the United Nations, focusing on international drug control strategy.

Notice: These articles reflect the opinion of the author and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey (PDFNJ). This information should not be construed as legal advice from the author or PDFNJ. Please consult your own attorney before making any legal decisions.