



# American Drug Testing

*Drug-Free Workplace Programs*

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## DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE ADVISOR

AN ONGOING SERIES TO PROTECT YOUR COMPANY BY HELPING TO KEEP DRUGS OUT OF YOUR WORKPLACE.

### Controlled Prescription Abuse at Record Level

**WASHINGTON**  
The number of Americans who abuse controlled prescription drugs has nearly doubled from 7.8 million to 15.1 million from 1992 to 2003 and abuse among teens has more than tripled during that time, according to a new report by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University.

*“...abuse among teens has more than tripled.”*

**Under the Counter: The Diversion and Abuse of Controlled Prescription Drugs in the U.S.**, a 214-page CASA report detailing the findings of an exhaustive three-year study of prescription opioids (e.g., OxyContin, Vicodin), central nervous system (CNS) depressants (e.g., Valium, Xanax) and CNS stimulants (e.g., Ritalin, Adderall), found that from 1992

to 2003, while the U.S. population increased 14 percent, the number of 12 to 17 year olds who abused



controlled prescription drugs jumped 212 percent and the number of adults 18 and older abusing such drugs climbed 81 percent.

The 15.1 million Americans abusing controlled prescription drugs exceed the combined number abusing cocaine (5.9 million), hallucinogens (4.0 million), inhalants (2.1 million) and heroin (.3 million).

“Our nation is in the throes of an epidemic of controlled prescription drug abuse and addiction,” said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA’s chairman and president and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. “While America has been congratulating itself in recent years on curbing increases in alcohol and illicit drug abuse, and in the decline in teen

smoking, abuse of prescription drugs has been stealthily, but sharply, rising.”

Among the report’s major findings:

- From 1992 to 2002, new abuse of prescription opioids among 12 to 17 year olds was up an astounding 542 percent, more than four times the rate of increase among adults.
- In 2003, 2.3 million 12 to 17 year olds (nearly one in 10) abused at least one controlled prescription drug; for 83 percent of them, the drug was opioids.
- In 2003, among 12 to 17 year olds, girls were likelier than boys to abuse controlled prescription drugs (10.1 percent of girls vs. 8.6 percent of boys).
- Between 1991 and 2003, rates of lifetime steroid abuse among high school students increased 126 percent, with abuse among girls up by nearly 350 percent, compared to 66 percent among boys.
- Teens who abuse controlled prescription drugs are twice as likely to use alcohol, five times likelier to use marijuana, 12

times likelier to use heroin, 15 times likelier to use Ecstasy and 21 times likelier to use cocaine, compared to teens who do not abuse such drugs.

#### Consequences of Abuse

In 2002, controlled prescription drugs were implicated in 29.9 percent of drug related emergency room deaths. Opioids were implicated in 18.9 percent of such deaths compared to 15.2 percent for cocaine, 12.6 percent for heroin and 2.6 percent for marijuana.

Between 1994 and 2002, controlled prescription drug-related emergency room mentions increased by nearly 80 percent, with opioid mentions jumping



168 percent, far more sharply than the increases of 48 percent for heroin and 39 percent for cocaine, and second only to the 198 percent increase in marijuana mentions.

*Source: The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse*

#### The Drug-Free Workplace Advisor

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Robert B. Dodenhoff  
President

- 43.3 percent of physicians do not ask about prescription drug abuse when taking a patient's health history.
- 33 percent do not regularly call or obtain records from the patient's previous (or other treating) physician before prescribing controlled drugs on a long-term basis.
- 47.1 percent say that patients commonly try to pressure them into prescribing a controlled drug.
- 74.1 percent have refrained from prescribing controlled drugs during the past 12 months because of concern that a patient might become addicted to them.
- 59.1 percent believe that patients account for the bulk of the diversion problem.
- Physicians perceive the three main mechanisms of diversion to be doctor shopping (when patients obtain controlled drugs from multiple doctors) (96.4 percent), patient deception or manipulation of doctors (87.8 percent), and forged or altered prescriptions (69.4 percent).
- Only 19.1 percent received any medical school training in identifying prescription drug diversion; only 39.6 percent received any training in medical school in identifying prescription drug abuse and addiction.

### **Pharmacist Survey Highlights**

- 28.4 percent do not regularly validate the prescribing physician's DEA number when dispensing controlled drugs; one in 10 (10.5 percent) rarely or never do so.
- 61 percent do not regularly ask if the patient is taking any other controlled drugs when dispensing a controlled medication; 25.8 percent rarely or never do so.
- When a patient presents a prescription for a controlled drug, 26.5 percent "somewhat or very often" think it is for purposes of diversion or abuse; 78.4 percent become "somewhat or very" concerned about diversion or abuse when a patient asks for a controlled drug by its brand name.
- 83.1 percent have refused to dispense a controlled drug in the past year because of suspicions of diversion or abuse; 51.8 percent believe that patients account for the bulk of the diversion problem.
- 28.9 percent have experienced a theft or robbery of controlled drugs at their pharmacy within the last five years; 20.9 percent do not stock certain controlled drugs in order to prevent diversion.
- Only about half received any training in identifying prescription drug diversion (48.1 percent) or abuse or addiction (49.6 percent) since pharmacy school.

CASA surveyed 979 physicians and 1,030 pharmacists from July 21 to October 31, 2004. The margin of error is +/-3%.