

June 20, 2012

Alberta's oil sands and construction industries launch Drug and Alcohol Risk Reduction Pilot Project

Two-year evaluation project will monitor the introduction of random workplace testing

EDMONTON, ALBERTA – Representatives of Alberta's energy and construction industries today announced their participation in a Drug and Alcohol Risk Reduction Pilot Project (DARRPP), a two-year initiative to evaluate and report on the effectiveness of comprehensive workplace alcohol and drug programs that will include random workplace testing.

DARRPP is led by a multi-stakeholder working group with broad representation that includes major oil sands industry employers and labour providers. The project's mandate is to establish best practices for random workplace alcohol and drug testing for safety sensitive sites and positions and develop guidelines for processes such as case management, assessment and follow-up. Working from a shared model, participating employers will introduce and monitor random workplace testing programs and share statistics related to their implementation.

Random workplace testing will not begin immediately. Over the summer and early fall, participating companies will be putting appropriate testing systems and processes in place, with implementation of pilot testing programs expected in late 2012 and early 2013. DARRPP will report its findings and recommendations to the participants, government and other stakeholders in 2014, with a goal of recommending a useful industry policy framework based on the results of the pilot.

"Alcohol and drug abuse in the workplace is an unfortunate reality in our society, and it poses serious risks to the individuals involved, their co-workers, families and communities," says DARRPP Administrator Pat Atkins, who has worked with alcohol and drug policies and programs as an oil sands human resources manager for over 25 years. "The addition of this pilot project builds on existing industry programs and policies and represents an important step forward in our approach to improving workplace safety."

Atkins notes that, along with effective safety training, sound policies and procedures, and disciplined incident reporting, alcohol and drug testing programs in the workplace can lead to measurable improvements in safety.

Random testing has been proven to have a positive impact on workplace and public safety in other jurisdictions:

- Since 1995, when the U.S. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) implemented mandatory alcohol and drug testing in the transportation industry, positive tests for employees subjected to random testing have declined by nearly 50%.
- A long-term U.S. study of the involvement of alcohol in fatal crashes in the trucking industry concluded that the implementation of random alcohol testing was found to be associated with a 23% reduction in fatal crashes involving large trucks.

Major oil sands and construction industry employers already use pre-site access, reasonable cause and post-incident testing. Atkins says she expects that by monitoring the results of random testing programs of participating Alberta employers, DARRPP will find they are a significant deterrent to alcohol and drug abuse in the workplace.

Atkins says DARRPP participants will balance the need to reduce safety risks with the responsibility to uphold human rights and privacy. "Participating employers will all have alcohol and drug programs that ensure employees who test positive are treated fairly and receive appropriate aftercare if they are dependent. This will have the additional benefit of prompting people who have dependencies to get help."

During the two years leading up to the project's launch, DARRPP's founders solicited input from human rights and privacy agencies and independent experts, including The Alberta Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta, to make sure the pilot addressed social concerns and legal requirements.

"Nothing is more important at a workplace than safety," said Dave Hancock, Minister of Human Services. "I am very impressed with the way in which the energy and construction industries have come together to develop this pilot. Reducing risk and ensuring worker safety in these vital sectors is equally important for both employers and employees and their families."

DARRPP participants include:

- Building and Construction Trades Canada - AFL-CIO
- Christian Labour Association of Canada
- Canadian Natural Resources Limited
- Construction Labour Relations – Alberta
- Construction Owners Association of Alberta
- Oil Sands Safety Association
- Progressive Contractors Association of Canada
- Suncor Energy, Inc.
- Total E&P Canada

Note to Editors: For more information about DARRPP, see the following question-and-answer document attached to this news release.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT DARRPP

Q: How serious are alcohol and drug problems in the energy and construction industries?

A: The use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs is a challenge in many industries, including energy and construction. Substances such as alcohol, marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamine can lead to increased risks on work sites, particularly in safety-sensitive positions such as heavy equipment operators and construction and maintenance trades, where a fleeting moment of inattention or a slow reaction can lead to a tragic outcome. Despite companies implementing numerous safety measures to reduce alcohol and drug use risks at worksites, it continues to be a significant safety issue.

Q: Random alcohol and drug testing is not a common practice in Canadian workplaces. What has changed to allow companies to conduct the random testing component of this pilot?

A: In 2008 an Alberta Court of Appeal ruling affirmed the right of employers to implement alcohol and drug testing policies. Following the court ruling, the Alberta Human Rights Commission (ARHC) published an [Information Sheet](#) that sets out clear principles related to workplace alcohol and drug testing, including random testing.

Q: Why was DARRPP formed?

A: Following the Alberta legal and human rights policy rulings mentioned above, the Construction Owners Association of Alberta (COAA) saw a need to clearly define what constitutes a reasonable approach to workplace alcohol and drug testing. After two years of extensive consultation with human rights and privacy agencies and independent experts, COAA and other industry players established DARRPP as an independent, multi-stakeholder group.

Q: Does a mandatory drug test violate a worker's basic human rights to privacy and freedom from discrimination?

A: Workplace alcohol and drug tests do not violate human rights. The AHRC information sheet states, "it is not the testing that triggers the protection of human rights law. It is the treatment by the employer of employees who are dependent on drugs or alcohol." If an employee tests positive, employers are required to have a qualified professional evaluate whether he or she has a dependency, and, if so, to provide appropriate treatment to help them recover and return to work.

Q: What happens if a worker tests positive for alcohol or drugs, but is found to not have a dependency?

A: The outcome would depend on his or her specific circumstances, and would be governed by the employer's policies and practices. In some cases a positive test with no alcohol or drug dependency may result in recommendations for a treatment or education program. In other cases, the employee could face disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Q: What kinds of testing will be used?

A: There are many kinds of alcohol and drug tests, including saliva and urine tests. DARRPP provides employers with suggested testing processes and guidelines. Each organization participating in DARRPP will determine what method of testing is appropriate for its work sites.

Q: Who will be tested? Will the pilot be limited to contractors or will it include all employees?

A: Each work site owner will determine safety sensitive jobs that have an elevated level of risk inherent to the position and the working environment. Contractors will conduct testing that is compliant with the Canadian Model, which indicates that where an owner requires random alcohol and drug testing, this must be applicable to all companies and employees at the work site.

Q: Is Alberta the only place where random alcohol and drug testing is being introduced into the workplace?

A: No. Random testing has been used in the Canadian transportation industry for many years for truck drivers whose routes cross the U.S./Canada border. More recently, random testing is being introduced in the Toronto public transit system. In October, 2011, in the aftermath of a fatal bus crash that killed a passenger, police charged the driver with criminal negligence causing death and possession of cannabis. One week later, on Oct. 19, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) approved the implementation of random alcohol and drug testing. In a policy update, the TTC stated “While privacy concerns may exist with respect to random testing, it is the position of the TTC staff that the obligation to provide a safe workplace to employees and a safe service to the public outweighs such concerns.”

Q: Why is random testing needed in Alberta’s oil sands and construction industries when employers already use pre-site access, reasonable cause and post-incident testing?

A: Despite a long-term, concerted effort to reduce alcohol and drug-related risks, our current practices are not as effective in identifying at-risk workers as they could be. Voluntary testing programs in our industries, such as the Rapid Site Access Program, have been successful, with growing participation rates, but they cover only a fraction of the workers in our industries. Reasonable cause testing, which is prompted by supervisors’ observations and interventions, is not sufficient by itself in identifying at-risk employees, despite hundreds of thousands of dollars spent over the years on extensive supervisor training. Industry data shows that close to six times more alcohol and drug abuse problems are revealed in substance abuse expert assessments *after* incidents occur than pre-emptive tests prompted by supervisor observations.

Q: Is it possible to test positive as a result of secondhand marijuana smoke?

A: Current workplace oral fluid tests for THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, do not identify trace amounts in a person’s system, but are keyed to detecting usage within the last 24 hours. Where urine tests are used, cut-offs have been established to eliminate the possibility of detecting second hand smoke.