

Drugs in the Library: Any Substance to Rumors?

Peter Schledorn

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Mandatory drug testing is one of the most divisive issues in the modern workplace. Given the current interest in this issue, it might be instructive to examine the experiences of a university library in another state with its pilot drug-testing program.

By executive order the governor of a large southeastern state instituted a policy that subjected all public employees to periodic, mandatory drug-screening tests. In his announcement the governor promised that the tests used would be the most scientifically advanced and accurate tests available, although budgetary restraints dictated a cost limit of \$1.47 per test. Drug tests usually cost between five and forty dollars each, depending on their reliability. However, one laboratory (Early Detection Systems, Inc., or EDS) agreed to provide the tests at the required price.

Approximately one hundred fifty library employees were subjected to urinalysis, resulting in thirty-six positive test results. The tests revealed the presence of a number of different substances, including poppy seed residue, ethylene glycol (automotive antifreeze), various popular antihistamines, methylene chloride (printer's deglazing solvent), tri-betafrustratase (a chemical found in the bodies of people who answer repetitive questions at reference desks), and 2,3,4-ditotene (copying machine fluid). Scientists and laboratory technicians could not explain why such a number and variety of solvents were detected in the samples but say they are working on the problem and hope to find a solution soon.

In the interest of fairness, employees testing positive were given the opportunity to have the tests repeated at their own expense. All thirty-six employees opted to take advantage of the seventy-five-dollar retest. Only one of the retests yielded

an identical result, although thirty-one of the tests did report positive for different substances, including isopropanol, creosote, contact cement and chocolate mousse. As a result, one library employee was summarily fired for smelling fresh ditto copies. All of the other employees are required to attend counseling sessions featuring aversion therapy.

Administrators and officials of the state in question were reportedly disappointed that more terminal personnel actions were not justified. They specifically criticized what they called the inaccuracy of the retesting program. As a result, one legislator proposed that the state take more direct action to combat drug use among state workers, including required searches of the homes of all job applicants (in order for the act to be "revenue neutral," the searches would be paid for by the applicant). Another filed a bill describing behavior that would be taken as presumptive evidence of drug use. Under this provision, an employee would be subject to disciplinary action for yawning, inattention during meetings, or any indication of an out-of-body experience on the job. Legislature watchers dubbed this bill the "Yawn Law" but dropped the name when they realized how many bills could be described by the phrase.

Meanwhile, the issue has been complicated by the discovery that book dust can mimic many different substances in the urine. Among these are beta-carotene, novocaine, and overripe brie. Only exposure to early Cheech and Chong movies is known to have a greater effect on urinalysis results. Reactions to this news are mixed—researchers are trying to develop more foolproof tests, with a goal of thirty percent accuracy by 1995, while a group of legislators are spearheading a drive to have book dust declared a controlled substance.

[Satire Alert: the author wishes it to be known that he takes no responsibility for any consequences that might result from this report being taken too seriously. If ingested, this article will cause you to test positive for wintergreen Life Savers and Type F automatic transmission fluid.]

Peter Schledorn is Library Technical Assistant in Collection Development at Davis Library at UNC-Chapel Hill.