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As/See It.

President Reagan's message last week to the nation on the threat of drug use prompted Administrator Engen to send the following letter to us:

The President and Mrs. Reagan spoke to the nation last night with a strong message on the threat of drug use in our country and what that threat means to each of us.

We in the FAA have a special trust placed in us because we maintain the standards for air safety and guide those who fly in the national airspace. We fly and maintain our own aircraft as well. Last year we faced up to the responsibility for that special trust and made the decision to demonstrate to all that we are drug-free. We developed a drug testing program, and we will be implementing that program at the end of the year.

Events concerning drug abuse have raised many questions in the FAA about drug testing procedures. Myths about drug testing have begun to develop. Attached are two papers. One is designed to help you to understand the testing process, and the other deals with some of the more commonly raised myths regarding drug testing. In addition, the Office of Aviation Medicine, working with the Employee Assistance Program, will undertake a program to provide briefings and educational materials to headquarters and regional employees and managers. You will be hearing much more.

The goal of our drug testing program is to achieve a drug-free work environment by identifying those who are abusing drugs, relieving them of safety-related duties, and giving them an opportunity to enter a rehabilitation program. If they remain drug-free, they can look forward to a rewarding career in their chosen profession.

I hope this information is helpful to you in understanding the drug testing process, and that it allays whatever concerns you might have on this very important issue that affects all of us.

Don Engen

FAA DRUG TESTING PROGRAM

FAA's drug testing program for employees in safety-related positions who are required to have a periodic medical examination will begin January 1987.

The testing will be part of the annual physical. Before the program begins, the Office of Aviation Medicine, working with the Employee Assistance Program, will undertake a program to provide briefings and educational materials to headquarters and regional employees and managers on the details.

Now we test for drugs only when we have reason to believe an employee may be abusing drugs. The testing procedure is identical to the one which will be used in the drug screening program to begin in January 1987. The procedure is as follows:

A urine sample is provided under medical supervision.

The sample is sealed and initialed by the employee, labeled and sent air express to the laboratory. The employee's initials on the specimen bottle begin the "chain of custody." The chain of custody procedure is maintained throughout the process to ensure the integrity of each sample.

A small portion of the specimen is subjected to what is called a screening test.

If the screening test is positive, then a second portion of the same specimen is subjected to a confirmation test. The confirmation test is performed by gas chromatography/mass spectrometry, a highly accurate technique.

The remaining portion of any specimen found positive in the process is placed in frozen storage indefinitely.

Employees may, at their own expense, elect to have the same specimen tested by another laboratory.

The contractor who will perform these services for FAA is CompuChem Laboratories, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. It is the world's largest, most comprehensive laboratory specializing in testing for drugs. The selection of CompuChem was based on their technical capabilities, and not on cost alone. Working with CompuChem to assist FAA in the development and implementation of the program will be two experienced firms that will provide program guidance and audit the collection process to ensure that proper procedures are followed and chain of custody is maintained.

The FAA has taken every step possible to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the drug testing process.

MYTHS AND FACTS OF DRUG TESTING

MYTH = Drug testing is inaccurate and produces false positive results.

FACT = A two-step laboratory procedure will be used in the FAA drug testing program. First, the specimen is screened. Specimens which show a positive result in the screening are presumed positives and are then subjected to step two, a confirmation test using gas/chromatography/mass spectrometry (GC/MS). The procedures rule out the possibility of false positives or misidentification of over-the-counter or prescription medications. Results of tests using these procedures have been accepted and sustained in Federal courts.

MYTH = An employee may be taking cough syrup, antihistamines, or prescription drugs which can be misread and the employee identified as a drug user.

FACT = Anyone taking a drug test will sign a consent form listing any medications, over-the-counter or prescription drugs being taken. The testing will identify the presence of such drugs through the two-step testing. The (GC/MS) test allows no false positives to be reported.

MYTH = A person can be identified as a drug user if he or she is present in a room where marijuana has been smoked.

FACT = A person in close proximity to marijuana smoke would not be reported as positive in a drug test.

MYTH - Urine specimens can be misplaced or mistakenly identified.

FACT - In the chain of custody procedure, an individual urine sample is witnessed and controlled from the time it is taken through the testing procedure at the laboratory. An evidence tape is sealed on the specimen bottle. The employee or applicant personally signs and witnesses the sealing of the sample. Strict chain of custody procedures apply.

MYTH - Consumption of herbal teas and poppy seed produce positive readings.

FACT - If someone consumed a sufficient quantity of European-type poppy seeds, it is possible that traces of morphine could appear in the urine. The opium poppy is not grown or available in the United States. In some European countries, the poppy seeds from bread or bakery products do contain this material.

Poppy seeds in bread baked in the United States have not and would not provide false positives for morphine. Consumption would have to be with foreign substances outside the U.S. to produce these results. U.S. drug testing laboratories have not reported measurable positive readings for morphine based on poppy seed consumption.

Tea available in the U.S. will not produce false positives. Consumption of such tea could provide trace elements identified as cocaine; however, such tea would have to be brewed from coca leaves which are prohibited in the U.S. The Federal Drug Administration prohibits food products with cocaine derivatives.