

Suggestions for Hiring Safe Workers

Many employers fear hiring new employees that are “high risk” for on-the-job injuries, especially those who have sustained previous injuries on or off the job. Having a comprehensive hiring process that addresses worker safety can help to alleviate some of those fears. Appropriate questions on the job application, during the interview process and at the time of job offer can meet this goal.

Due to Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity legislation, most hiring managers know that there is list of questions that cannot be asked of a job applicant relating to their physical abilities, such as: “Do you have any disabilities?” “Please complete the following medical history.” “Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations?” “What was the date of your last physical exam?” “How is your family’s health?”

Instead it is wise and more appropriate to ask something like this: “Based on the description of this position, can you demonstrate or describe how you would perform the following job related functions.” (This is acceptable only when the interviewer has thoroughly described the position through a job description and essential job functions.) Or, “Do you understand that any offer of employment is conditional based on the results of a pre-employment exam or drug test?” If you do not have a pre-employment drug screen policy, consider the fact that about 74.3% of current, admitted drug users are employed¹ and that 38% - 50% of all work-related accidents are drug or alcohol related.²

Creating the right questions for the job interview can also be a useful tool for candidate selection. This is where the hiring manager can get a picture of the applicant’s views of on-the-job safe work practices. Always avoid questions that result in “yes” or “no” answers, and ask questions such as the following: “Who is responsible for your safety on the job?” “If you were to compare safety and quality, which would you consider to be more important and why?” “If your supervisor asked you to do something that you felt had potential to injure yourself or others, what would you do?” “Have you ever seen a co-worker performing an unsafe act? If so, how did you react?” There is a wide spectrum of possible answers to these questions, and can be very insightful to how your applicant will perform on the job.

One other typical hiring practice is background checking. Many employers choose to recover a job applicant’s workers’ compensation claims history report. Although it is not illegal to obtain this information with the applicant’s permission, it is illegal to make a hiring decision based on the results of that report.

¹<http://oas.samhsa.gov/nhsda/2k3nsduh/2k3Overview.htm#ch2>. The report states as follows: “Although the rate of drug use was higher among unemployed persons compared to those from other employment groups, most drug users were employed. Of the 16.7 million illicit drug users ages 18 or older in 2003, 12.4 million (74.3 percent) were employed either full or part time.”

²<http://www.ohiobwc.com/downloads/brochureware/publications/DFWPtechmanual.pdf>.