

Reminders and Cautions

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It has been quite a while since I have addressed you in these pages. The simple reason for that is that there have been very few problems with the Drug/Alcohol testing programs on our property and those problems we have had have been covered by confidentiality and anonymity concerns.

However, with the influx of new people in our ranks and the tendency of some of us to forget (CRS Disease), I felt it is time for some reminders and cautions.

Although we are only tested for five prohibited families of drugs—marijuana, opiates, PCB, amphetamines, and heroin (as well as alcohol)—the regulations forbid flying while using any substance, legal or illegal, prescription or non-prescription, that can adversely affect our performance.

I get literally hundreds of calls a year asking basically two questions: “I am taking DRUG XYZ” (prescribed or over-the-counter).

Question 1: “Will I test positive on a drug test?”

Question 2: “Can I fly on this medication?”

I have a standard answer to both of these questions: Call and ask your AME (Aviation Medical Examiner) or ALPA Aeromedical in Denver.

For me to advise you on this matter would constitute practicing medicine, which I am not qualified to do. Also, your family doctor is not qualified to answer these questions (unless he/she is also an AME) as there are many drugs

that are in common use but are not approved for use while exercising the privileges of your Medical Certificate.

Some common sense can prevail. READ THE LABEL. If it has red flags such as “may cause drowsiness,” “do not operate equipment,” or lists any kind of ALCOHOL as an ingredient, then that is a good indication that you may not fly while using that medication. Another caution, especially for our International crews: many common over-the-counter drugs available here in the States have different formula overseas and many drugs available here only by prescription are available over-the-counter in other countries. For example, TYLENOL-3 (TYLENOL with CODEINE) is by prescription-only in the U.S., but widely available over-the-counter in other countries. Not only could you be in drug-testing trouble, but also Customs/DEA problems for possessing this drug without a proper prescription. Again, READ THE LABEL.

There is no published list of prohibited drugs as the list changes daily. Only your AME or ALPA Aeromedical can give you the current information.

A couple of cautions pertaining to Alcohol Testing:

We are bound by the Company’s approved program, which states that a crewmember may not consume alcohol within 12 hours OF ANY ASSIGNED DUTY. The key word here is DUTY, not FLIGHT. You are on Assigned Duty one hour (1:30 international) before your first



flight. This means you cannot consume alcohol (in any form) within 13 hours (13:30 international) of your first scheduled flight. This same regulation pertains to Reserves. You may not consume alcohol within 12 hours of GOING ON RESERVE.

The above warning leads to this second warning. The 12-hour rule is based on average metabolism rates. There are published charts purporting to show the AVERAGE metabolism rates for alcohol: DO NOT RELY ON THEM. Each individual's metabolism is different. Also if you have to count your drinks and try to play

“Beat the Clock” you are probably not drinking sensibly and this may be an indication of a deeper problem.

I know Drug/Alcohol testing can be a stressful occurrence but don't take out your frustrations on the testing personnel. If you have problems with a test, contact me and be prepared to put it in writing. I have a good working relationship with the proper personnel, but without it in writing I can do nothing.

Fly Safe!



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