

Today's Trucking

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Drugged drivers still on the road; ATA urges congressional action

WASHINGTON -- Some truckers who flunk mandatory drug tests in the U.S. have slipped through the screening process and may still be driving commercial trucks, a new government investigation has found.

The **Government Accountability Office** -- an inter-governmental watchdog agency -- released a 74-page report this week that describes how a lack of oversight makes it easy for truckers caught with drugs in their system to move on to other companies.

Improvements to drug testing programs could better identify truckers who use illegal drugs and keep them off the road, suggested the report.

In response, the **American Trucking Associations** is once again urging Congress to take swift action to authorize and fund a national database of drug and alcohol testing results of commercial drivers, a move it has been lobbying for and one that is among the GAO's recommendations.

Some of the problems the report found included:

The **Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's** limited oversight resources; the ease of subverting the urine test, either because collection sites are not following protocols or because drivers are using products that are widely available to adulterate or substitute urine specimens.

Also, drivers are not divulging past drug test history; carriers' are failing to conduct thorough background checks on a driver's past drug testing history and "have limited incentives" to do so. Self-employed owner-operators' are also not removing themselves from service.

Fewer than half of the estimated 85,000 truck drivers who test positive in random drug tests each year are believed to complete the required treatment and follow-up testing to return to their jobs, the GAO said.

The GAO and the ATA recommend strengthening the enforcement of safety audits for new carriers; additional authority to levy fines when collection sites do not follow federal protocols; banning products that allow drivers to cheat a drug test; and a national database of drug testing information.

"Trucking has worked diligently to eradicate drug and alcohol abuse from its work force. And we've made great progress in recent years," said ATA President and CEO Bill Graves. "But we are requesting additional help from the government since it is a federally required program involving significant federal oversight. Today's release of a Government Accountability Office report confirms the need for what ATA has been recommending for many years -- a national database of drug and alcohol test results."

Also consistent with GAO's recommendations, ATA is asking Congress to ban the manufacture, sale and distribution of products that help some drivers evade drug tests; provide for penalties for those who use them; and give the U.S. Department of Transportation more authority to improve oversight of specimen collection facilities and practices.

Furthermore, Congress should direct the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the U.S. DOT to initiate a rulemaking that allows the testing of alternative specimens such as hair, ATA said. Hair testing allows illegal drug use to be detected for a longer period of time.

Finally, the DOT needs to create a tougher audit process and enhanced penalties for new carriers entering the trucking business, ATA urges.

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