

PILOT HEALTH and REHABILITATION

Random drug and alcohol testing in Canada

In Canada we do not have random drug and alcohol testing for pilots, however we do have testing for cause and random testing once a dependency issue has been identified. Canadian pilots are not subject to random testing unless there is reasonable grounds to be concerned for flight safety. For example if a Pilot is displaying odd behavior or a crew member, airline staff, airport security etc. have reason to believe a pilot is attempting to operate an aircraft under the influence, the pilot will be removed from service and tested. If a pilot is involved in an incident where there is damage to an aircraft and/or injury to crew or passengers, the pilot may then be subject to testing. If a pilot is suspected of breaking civil aviation regulations or company policy regarding alcohol or drugs and consumption prior to duty then again the pilot is subject to testing. Transport Canada does not do random testing on pilots as it is contradictory to the Canadian charter of human rights. To randomly test someone from a group would be considered discriminatory. Testing of pilots is done on a pre-employment basis and is allowed as it does not discriminate or single out any one person. Outside the airline industry certain companies do drug and alcohol testing on pilots, but it a company policy that all employees are subject to the same testing and again no one person is singled out.

We feel that a well developed and maintained pilot peer support system is the best way to recognize and support a pilot with substance abuse issues. The pilot assistance program gives the pilot a safe, confidential way to address his or her dependency and seek proper treatment.

There are a couple of ways a pilot can enter the program:

- 1) If a pilot is involved in a work place incident where he is subject to discipline, suspension or dismissal, the pilot is asked to submit to an assessment by an addictions specialist. The discipline the pilot is facing is then held in abeyance until the outcome of the assessment.
- 2) On occasion a pilot will approach their pilot peer with specific lifestyle concerns. My wife says I drink too much, my friends are voicing concerns that maybe I drink too much and I should get some help. I drink to ease the pain but the pain is getting worse and my life is out of control. You get the idea and from here the process starts the same with an assessment with an addictions specialist.

For our purposes the assessment has two out comes, either the pilot is chemically dependent or not. DSM 5 the diagnostic manual the medical profession uses to determine dependency breaks it down into mild, moderate or severe and a diagnosis within that precludes some form of treatment. If a pilot is found not to be chemically dependent after the assessment and has been involved with a work place incident, the pilot must then face the disincline set out by the employer.

When a pilot is diagnosed with chemical dependency, Transport Canada suspends or removes the medical validation portion of a pilot's license. Once the medical has been suspended the pilot has two options, the first is to voluntarily enter the pilot health and rehabilitation program or he may choose to attempt rehabilitation on his own. In Canada if the pilot chooses to go his own route his medical validation is then suspended for a minimum of two years and at the end of that period he must then prove to Transport that he has remained clean and sober for that two years and that he has a plan in place to remain sober. If the pilot chooses to enter the ALPA program they are sent to a 45 day in house treatment program. After completing the treatment, a tripartite committee is formed consisting of an addictions specialist, a pilot peer and a company manager (chief pilot). This group then meets with the pilot on a month basis for a minimum of two years. The tripartite committee can increase the frequency of the meeting and extend beyond the two years based on the needs of the pilot. When the tripartite committee feels the pilot is well established in his recovery, they send a letter to Transport Canada suggesting the pilot be reissued a medical validation. Most pilot pilots return to work within 6 to 8 months.

The discussions within the tripartite are kept strictly confidential and the aim of this group is to provide guidance and support for the pilot while he manages his new found sobriety.

After treatment the pilot is also subject to random drug and alcohol testing for the balance of his career.

Relapse is a fact of life with recovery and should a pilot relapse they would then be sent for another assessment and possible treatment. In most cases should if a pilot relapses a second time the original discipline that was held in abeyance will then be initiated?

This program is fully endorsed by Transport Canada and the airlines involved. It is far more cost effective than random testing. It is well known that 8 to 10% of the general population has a problem with addiction and that stat does not change with pilots. In Canada the pilot health and rehabilitation has had a 93% success rate and that is largely due to the follow up support the pilot receives from the tripartite committee. The tripartite process is well established and documented and therefore provides transparency for all involved. Confidentiality, education and voluntary participation are all key elements of the tripartite program.

Canadian ALPA Pilot Assistance

Of the pilots by the pilots for the pilots

It is a simple statement but it is the foundation of the entire Pilot Assistance program, its basically pilots helping pilots.