



# Selected Papers of William L. White

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## Testing for Recent Alcohol Use

### Abstract

Drug testing is a powerful tool in the prevention, early intervention, treatment, and the management of drug-related problems. Over the past 25 years, drug testing has dramatically increased in business and industry, the U.S. military, secondary schools, professional sports, addiction treatment programs, the criminal and juvenile justice systems, and the child protection system. The Achilles' heel to the current system of drug testing has been that routine testing procedures until recently excluded the most widely used intoxicant in the United States. Monitoring individuals for recent alcohol use is hampered by the rapid metabolism of alcohol. Until recently, this has limited alcohol testing to a few hours after drinking stops. Several new developments are making it easier to test for

alcohol use in the 3-5 days preceding the test by identifying the presence of alcohol metabolites (the by-products of the body's processing of alcohol). This is especially important in monitoring alcohol use in settings in which no alcohol use is permitted, e.g., alcoholism and drug abuse treatment, professional assistance programs, abstinence as a condition of probation or parole, or child custody, and for people under the legal drinking age. This article describes these new testing procedures and suggests ways they can be successfully integrated into a comprehensive probation- and parole-based alcohol and drug testing program. Because these tests for alcohol use are new, the practice guidelines are evolving rapidly. We describe the current best practices in the new testing