

Drug Testing - What is Chain of Custody?



"Chain of Custody" refers to the document or paper trail showing the seizure, custody, control, transfer, analysis, and disposition of physical and electronic evidence. For drug testing it is the course of action of documenting the management and storage of a specimen from the moment a donor gives the specimen to the collector to the final destination of the specimen and the review and reporting of the final result.

Any and all drug testing should incorporate a Chain of Custody form and process to insure the integrity of the specimen to be tested. This includes both laboratory and instant drug testing. A multipart Chain of Custody form and other supplies are used to complete the Chain of Custody process. These supplies would include packaging type, seals and other relevant information to be included for verification upon transport and turnover to the respective testing facility. The Chain of Custody form is added onto as the test specimen travels from person to person and this provides for specimen integrity and accountability of a test sample. The Chain of Custody form has been given a status of a legal document for it has the ability to invalidate a specimen that has been tampered with and that does not have the complete information written on it. A broken or mismatched seal on the specimen bottle will also invalidate the specimen being tested. Being a legal document, tampering or mishandling the Chain of Custody form is subject to investigation and subsequent penalization in accordance with the law.

Upon transport, the Chain of Custody form is again updated and again written to as it is received by the test laboratory. Upon reaching the laboratory, the specifics of the test that will be conducted with the time, date and signature of the person processing the sample are written. Upon the conclusion of the tests with the results finalized, this Chain of Custody document is copied and returned to the Medical Review Officer (MRO) for interpretation and conclusion. The MRO will record his final result on the completed Chain of Custody form and may also transport this result electronically using a particular result reporting software. Throughout the process a copy of the form may be retained by the specimen collector, the agency requiring testing, the donor, the laboratory and finally the MRO with this MRO copy having the final result recorded.

All of the processes involving the Chain of Custody document serve as assurance to the test subject that the specimen that was provided was handled and tested in the enumerated procedures outlined in the in the Mandatory Guidelines for Federal Workplace Drug Testing Programs. These guidelines are common to drug testing throughout the United States and provide standards for the testing process. All information including the Chain of Custody form are considered to be highly private and confidential for both federal and private employees, schools and other agencies that require testing. Even the results that are given by the MRO that are documented and reported are considered confidential as part of the stated regulatory guidelines. Specimen integrity and donor privacy are critical.

