



FTA STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: OVER-THE-COUNTER AND PRESCRIPTION DRUG USE IN THE PUBLIC TRANSIT INDUSTRY

FINAL REPORT

Background

Recent federal legislation prompted FTA to establish the Safety Management System (SMS) framework as the basis for its National Public Transportation Safety Program. SMS is a formal, top-down, organization-wide approach to managing safety risk and ensures the effectiveness of the transit agency's safety risk mitigation. SMS includes systematic procedures, practices, and policies for managing risks and hazards. Numerous National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) accident investigations have indicated prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter (OTC) medication impairment as a contributor to transportation safety events and associated injuries and fatalities. The risk of impairment-related events continues to remain an area of concern.

Objectives

Objectives of this project were to perform background research and analysis on the need for new standards, recommended practices, guidance documents, or procedural considerations in Rx and OTC medication risk management; identify gaps that may exist in standards, recommended practices, or guidance documents available to the industry to address Rx/OTC use; and present findings to FTA for its consideration related to the development or issuance of voluntary standards, protocols, guidelines, or recommended practices related to Rx/OTC risk management.

Findings and Conclusions

Expanding Rx/OTC research and industry guidance on the impacts of Rx/OTC medication use by safety-sensitive employees could lead to improved internal transit agency policies and procedures and collective bargaining agreements and reduced Rx/OTC-related safety events.

This report documents background research and analysis on the need for new standards, recommended practices, guidance documents, or procedural considerations in Rx and OTC medication risk management. Gaps that exist in current standards, recommended practices, or guidance documents available to the industry to address Rx/OTC use are identified, and findings are included that address the development or issuance of voluntary standards, protocols, guidelines, or recommended practices related to Rx/OTC risk management and associated topics.

CUTR's Transit Standards Working Group provided content for the study's background research and guidance to the research team, which contacted several transit agencies for information on how they respond to a significant safety concern notification. Through examination of current guidance and regulations, a literature review, and subject matter expert guidance, the following findings were developed:

- Standards do not currently exist to aid transit agencies in responding to receipt of a reported Medication Safety Concern following an FTA-authorized drug test. Development of guidance or standards may reduce agency policy variations and improve safety outcomes through nationally consistent protocols.
- Periodic fitness-for-duty evaluations for all employees performing safety-sensitive duties (not just operators) could pro-actively identify an employee's medical condition and/or medication use that may pose a significant safety concern.
- The DOT/FTA drug testing panel does not currently include all potentially driver-impairing (PDI) medications. Expansion of this panel to include the Benzodiazepines drug class may aid in identifying a safety-sensitive employee's use of potentially dangerous prescription drugs such as diazepam and alprazolam.
- Employer policies that require all safety-sensitive employees to report the use of Rx/OTC medication identified as PDI may reduce risks posed by their use, leading to a reduction in impairment-related fatality or injury events.

Benefits

Recognition of the negative effects of Rx/OTC use, collection of Rx/OTC medication use information, and development of new standards and guidance related to employees performing safety-sensitive duties could lead to safety event reductions.

FTA Report No. 0217 Project Information

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