SPECIFIC GRAVITY

(To be shared with each employee before they take a drug test)

WHAT IS A SPECIFIC GRAVITY?

A specific gravity urine test is one in which the specimen has been diluted in some way. It may occur intentionally by the donor adding something to the urine (adulteration), or by the donor drinking large amounts of liquid to flush the system (dilution).

It may also occur unintentionally when the donor (fearing he / she may not be able to produce a specimen) drinks a lot of fluids prior to the drug test, resulting in over-dilution.

WHY IS SPECIFIC GRAVITY SO IMPORTANT?

Specific gravity tests are often followed up by a positive drug test. It is one of the two most often used ways to cover up a positive drug test. For this reason, companies do not overlook a test with a specific gravity comment. Please understand that although you may have unintentionally diluted your specimen, this is a method often used intentionally by drug users.

As a donor, you should avoid doing those things which could cause your specimen to fall below specific gravity limits thus placing you in violation of the company policy.

An employer will take the necessary action according to the company’s policy on specific gravity. Policies may range from allowing the donor to test one more time, to observing or witnessing a second test, or to a more severe policy, which may include suspension, termination, or not hiring a person who tests with a specific gravity.

HOW CAN I AVOID A SPECIFIC GRAVITY ON A PRE-EMPLOYMENT TEST?

Eat a good meal 2 to 4 hours before taking a drug test and limit your intake of fluids. A rule of thumb is one 12 ounce liquid (such as a can of coke) one hour prior to the drug test.

If you normally consume more liquids in a day, curb your use for that day; and it may be a good idea to void (urinate) one or two times before taking the test to rid the body of
excess fluids. The body is constantly producing urine and it should not take you very long to produce a good specimen under this circumstance.

WHAT PROCEDURES SHOULD I FOLLOW IF I AM SELECTED FOR A RANDOM TEST, AND WANT TO AVOID A SPECIFIC GRAVITY?

If you have not consumed any liquids or only a very small amount of liquid prior to your notification, you should drink one 12 ounce liquid. (A diet coke is a good diuretic.) Do not consume any more liquids until you have given your specimen.

If you have consumed large amounts of liquid, following the basic guidelines for a pre-employment test, notify your supervisor of the fact that you have consumed a large excess of liquid that day, that you would like to void once before the drug test. You should not be allowed any liquids from that point on.

If you are still concerned about your specimen after following the procedures above, you may ask the collector to see if he / she believes your specimen is within range as far as specific gravity is concerned. Often the collector can determine specific gravity by the color of the urine. However, please know that some things ingested into the body such as vitamins and certain medications and herbs can also color the urine, so that the collector may not be able to guarantee a specimen is within range simply by it’s color.

A NOTE TO THE EMPLOYER OR SUPERVISOR IN CHARGE OF A RANDOM DRUG TESTING:

The employer, or supervisor in charge, can quickly determine the potential status of the donor for himself by simply informing the donor he has been selected for a random drug test, and then by asking him how much liquid he has had that day. If the donor says for example, “I had one cup of coffee this morning when I arrived and nothing since then,” the supervisor may suggest to the donor that he get a can of coke and report to the designated waiting area. On the other hand, if the donor says, “I have had my usual fifteen cups of coffee today,” the supervisor should inform him to void once, not to drink any more liquids at all, and report to the appointed waiting area.

This is the reason why all employers should notify their employees who have been selected one hour prior to the drug test. It allows the employee to properly prepare himself / herself for the test. However, the employer (supervisor in charge) should also restrict the notified donor to a waiting area to make certain he / she does not consume more than the allowed liquid.

A notified donor may be allowed to return to his work location; however, precaution should be taken to make certain the employee does not accidentally or on purpose forget about the liquid consumption allowance.

One important thing to remember is that we should all be concerned about helping a donor produce an honorable specimen. Our purpose is not to police or excessively
restrict employees, but rather to inform them. Most employees who are well informed of the guidelines and why they are important, are willing to abide by them as they do other safety guidelines.

**DOT TESTING**
The DOT policy regarding negative-dilute specimens – With dilute specimens showing creatinine level of greater than 5mg/dl and less than 20 mg/dl, the employer may require the donor to submit to another specimen collection. The re-collection cannot be done under direct observation. If the employer adopts a policy of re-collection for negative-dilute results, all employees must be treated the same. However, the employer may elect to treat different types of tests differently (e.g. re-collect for pre-employment tests, but not for random tests).

If the second test is also negative-dilute, the employer must accept that result and cannot continue re-collections. The second test is the test of record. An applicant/employee's refusal to submit to a re-collection for a negative-dilute result is a refusal to test under the DOT rule. On May 28, 2003, the Department of Transportation (DOT) announced that it was immediately changing the definition of a "substituted" specimen in urine drug testing so that urine specimens with a creatinine level greater than 2mg/dL but less than 5 mg/dL will no longer be reported as "substituted." This change is important because a "substituted" test is considered a refusal to take a drug test, which is a violation of DOT rules equivalent to failing a drug test. The reason for the change is that the DOT has learned of a small number of cases in which individuals appear to have had legitimate medical explanations for producing specimens with a creatinine level of less than or equal to 5 mg/dL. In addition, the DOT concluded that there is an increasing consensus among scientific and medical experts that the 5 mg/dL standard may not be appropriate.

Under the new rules, when the Medical Review Officer (MRO) gets a report from the laboratory that the creatinine level in a specimen is less than 2 mg/dL or the creatinine is "not detected," the MRO will report the specimen to the employer as "substituted." Dilute specimens will not cause the employee to be regarded as violating the regulation.

When the MRO gets a report from the laboratory that the creatinine level in a specimen is greater than or equal to 2 mg/dL but less than or equal to 5 mg/dL, the MRO will report the specimen to the employer as "dilute" and must, under the new rules, direct the employer to require the employee to undergo an immediate recollection under direct observation. The employer must then ensure that this recollection takes place. Remember that the dilute with creatinine level greater than 5mg/dl and less than 20 mg/dl can require a second collection but it cannot be directly observed unless another reason for the direct observation is present.