

Toxicology 101 for Attorneys

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1

Make sure you know what the “menu” is when drawing conclusions from toxicology testing results. That is, what exactly was tested for? What drugs are of interest to your case but may have not been tested for? Remember: there isn’t a drug test that can pick up every prescription and illicit drug.

2

Signs of visible intoxication vary from person to person at a given alcohol level. That’s why the use of charts with blood alcohol ranges and expected visible behaviors/appearances in isolation is a slippery slope.

3

Even over-the-counter medications can cause psychomotor impairment. Don’t discount the over-the-counter sleep aid, antihistamine, cold medicine...especially if combined with even “low” levels of alcohol.

4

Drug screens look for compounds with structural similarities. Typically the major metabolite of cocaine, benzoylecgonine, is screened for, and it has a unique structure. Therefore, cross-reactivity with other compounds leading to false-positive results is unlikely.

5

A person can be impaired from a drug even if the drug level was within the laboratory’s “normal range”. This is a complex concept but I’ll sum it up by saying normal ranges mean different things for different drugs.

