

2 in 3 Truck Drivers Enter the DOT SAP Process With No Idea What to Expect, New Survey Finds

American River Wellness surveyed 1,060 U.S. CDL holders on the SAP return-to-duty process, including cost, timeline, and how well drivers understood it.

SACRAMENTO, CA, UNITED STATES, August 14, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A single DOT drug or alcohol violation can put a commercial driver's livelihood on hold, but most drivers say they had little idea what the return-to-duty process would actually involve, or cost, before it started.

[American River Wellness](#), a DOT qualified SAP provider, surveyed 1,060 current and former U.S. Commercial Driver's License holders for [The 2026 State of the DOT SAP Return-to-Duty Process](#) report, to understand how drivers experience the process from the inside: what leads to a violation, how much they paid for the program, whether their employer stayed supportive through the return-to-duty process, and whether drivers would choose the same SAP provider again.

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Drivers always ask me about the evaluation fee first, but in my experience, it's rarely what actually costs them the most. It's the paycheck they miss while they're off the road.”

Graham Sargent

Most drivers started the SAP process without knowing what to expect during the program.

Before starting their DOT SAP program, only 9.4% of drivers say they understood it completely. A combined 67.9% understood only some of it, or had no idea what it involved at all, including 29.2% who said they had no idea whatsoever. Most violations happen when a driver fails a random drug or alcohol test, which accounts for 43.4% of

cases, and marijuana or THC is the substance involved most often, showing up in 49.1% of



The 2026 State of the DOT SAP Return-to-Duty Process by American River Wellness

cases.

The real cost of the SAP process isn't the evaluation fee, it's the income drivers lose while they're off the road.

The SAP evaluation fee itself typically runs \$451 to \$600, but for most drivers it's a small piece of a much bigger bill. Lost income is by far the largest expense: 69.8% of drivers lost more than \$3,000 in income during the process, and 47.2% lost more than \$6,000. To cover those costs, 61.3% of drivers went into some form of debt, using a credit card, a payment plan, a personal loan, or money borrowed from family or friends. For most drivers, being off the road during the SAP process lasts well over a month. 57.5% were off for at least a month, and 8.5% never returned to CDL work at all.

Most drivers don't go back to their old job.

The SAP process often resets a driver's employment entirely. Only 30.2% of drivers returned to their previous employer afterward. 37.7% moved to a new employer in the same industry, 9.4% became self-employed or independent contractors, and 15.1% left CDL work altogether. Employer support during the process was mixed: 43.4% of drivers described their employer as very or somewhat supportive, while 22.6% called their employer unsupportive or worse, including 2.8% who reported retaliation such as being fired or pressured to quit.

Drivers are split on whether they'd select the same provider again.

Online search is how most drivers find a SAP provider, cited by 35.8% of respondents, more than any referral source. But looking back, opinion is nearly split down the middle: 42.4% say they'd probably or definitely choose a different provider next time, while 39.6% would stick with the one they had.

"Drivers are making a big decision on a short timeline, so it's worth asking a provider clear questions upfront, about pricing, about who you'll actually be working with, before you commit," said Graham Sargent, DOT-Qualified Substance Abuse Professional and founder of American River Wellness.

Full findings and methodology are available at The [2026 State of the DOT SAP Return-to-Duty Process by American River Wellness](#).

About the report

In July 2026, American River Wellness surveyed 1,060 current and former U.S. CDL holders from all 50 states and Washington, DC, all of whom had personally completed the DOT SAP return-to-duty process. Respondents were recruited through a double opt-in online panel and screened to confirm they met the survey's criteria.

About American River Wellness

American River Wellness is a DOT-qualified Substance Abuse Professional (SAP) provider based in Sacramento, CA, serving drivers and safety-sensitive employees nationwide. Founded in 2018, the company offers 100% virtual DOT SAP evaluations with same- or next-day appointments and transparent pricing. Evaluations are led directly by Graham Sargent, a DOT-Qualified SAP with more than 14 years of experience who has completed over 4,000 DOT SAP evaluations. American River Wellness is recognized by DISA, NDASA, and the Better Business Bureau (A+ rating), and offers multilingual support and free consultation for five years after case completion. Learn more at americanriverwellnessrecovery.com.

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