

TOWARDS A **DRUG-FREE** WORKPLACE

Dr Wayne Severn of Scenttech drug detector services discusses ways of turning your business into a drug-free workplace.



ALL WORKPLACES MUST comply with the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992. This requires employers to take all practicable steps to identify and manage hazards in their workplaces.

Under this act, a hazard is defined as: (1) An activity, arrangement, circumstance, event, occurrence, phenomenon, process, situation, or substance (whether arising or caused within or outside a place of work) that is an actual or potential cause or source of harm; and (2) a situation where a person's behaviour may be an actual or potential cause or source of harm to the person or another person; and without limitation, a situation described in subparagraph (1) resulting from physical or mental fatigue, drugs, alcohol, traumatic shock, or another temporary condition that affects a person's behaviour.

This means that drug and alcohol use, even if consumed outside work hours, becomes an occupational health and safety issue if a worker's ability to exercise judgement, coordination, or alertness in the workplace is impaired and leads to an increased risk of injury or incidents involving themselves or others.

All too often it is the small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) that fail to adhere to health and safety legislation.

By not implementing a drug-free workplace policy, these businesses become the "employer-of-choice" for drug users wishing to evade detection. International studies indicate that, among the full-time workforce, SMEs employ over six times as many illicit drug users as large businesses. The reasons for this are many and varied but inevitably centre on the misconceptions that drug testing is "too expensive" or "not necessary because I know all of my workers".

However, many drug users are adept at hiding their drug habits and they easily sail through interviews and background checks.

For the SME, the drug testing return on investment is even more meaningful. Proportionally, the cost of just one drug or alcohol related incident can have a greater impact on a small business than on a large business. In some instances a single event will devastate a small business both financially and by loss of reputation.

Establishing a drug-free workplace is neither costly nor time consuming, if done correctly.

An effective drug-free programme is workplace specific and will vary according to the requirements of a particular business. However, they will all include at least two of the following basic components:

DETECTION – the location of illicit drugs in the workplace or the determination of recent drug use. These procedures are most



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commonly performed by drug detection dogs. A well-trained and validated detection dog can effectively screen all your staff for recent drug use and drug possession. Furthermore, these searches are non-intrusive, non-confrontational and require no participation on behalf of the employee (no loss of employee time). This method lends itself to businesses with large areas to search, particularly factories, warehouses and building sites.

TESTING – this involves the detection of drug use by employees or job candidates. There are a variety of methods available for drug testing in the workplace, each having different drug detection times. In general, the detection time is longest in hair analysis (90 days or longer), followed by urine (1.5 hours to seven days or longer) and saliva (0.25 to 24 hours). Urine and oral fluid testing are required to be performed under Standards AS/NZS 4308:2008 and AS4760:2006, respectively.

Urine is the most commonly used sample to determine drug use. It detects the use of a drug within the period of the past few weeks; however, a positive test does not necessarily mean that the individual was impaired at the time of testing. This has raised privacy issues as the employer does not have the right to investigate non-work related activities.

New generation saliva (oral fluid) testing devices have recently become available in New Zealand. Saliva testing is a good way of detecting recent drug use and it is more likely to reflect current impairment than other workplace testing methods. Saliva collection can also be performed under direct observation, thus reducing the risk of sample adulteration and substitution. For these reasons, this procedure is gaining popularity with employers as well as with the Employment

Court, the Police, and with the unions.

DETERRENT – a programme of scheduled drug detection or testing visits to your workplace will provide a strong deterrent to the use of drugs and it will discourage drug users viewing your business as a safe haven. The visit by a drug detection dog(s) is a cost-effective way of reinforcing the drug-free message in your workplace.

EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION – providing educational information to your staff allows them to make an 'informed decision' on the consequences of drug use. A rehabilitation programme may include both education and counselling. These are particularly effective ways of increasing the likelihood that an employee will comply with the company's alcohol and drug policy.

If small and medium sized businesses do not want drug users to view their business as a safe haven, there are affordable detection and testing services that can be adapted to any business setting and budget.

Scenttech works with small, medium, and large businesses, providing high quality drug and alcohol testing programmes using canine detection, urine testing and "state of the art" saliva (oral fluid) technologies.

There is simply no reason to put your company's hard-earned reputation at risk of damage from employees using drugs and alcohol in your workplace.

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