

For immediate release

ON-SITE WORKPLACE DRUG SCREENING INCREASES 31% IN 2012

The number of on-site workplace drug tests has increased 31% over the last year reports the New Zealand Drug Detection Agency (NZDDA) in the release of its annual statistics. In 2012 NZDDA conducted 68,561 on-site drug screening tests, up from 52,124 tests carried out in 2011. This follows an increase of 77.7% from the 29,513 tests carried out in 2010.

Screening for alcohol in the workplace, in 2012 NZDDA conducted 39,369 breath alcohol tests - up 32% from 2011 when 29,791 tests were carried out. In 2010 there were 13,821 tests conducted. Of the 39,369 alcohol tests performed last year, 0.4% of the tests were positive, the same figure as for 2011. In 2010, 1.9% of alcohol tests were positive.

NZDDA's chief executive Chris Hilson says, "The rise in the number of on-site workplace drug and alcohol tests in 2012 illustrates that many more employers are taking workplace safety very seriously. Most of our testing takes place in the safety-sensitive sectors such as forestry, transport and construction - sectors in which it's vital for employee safety but also for their customers and suppliers and, in some cases, the general public. There's no second chance if there's any impairment from drugs and alcohol in those workplaces."

NZDDA is New Zealand's only fully compliant AS/NZS4308:2008 International Accreditation New Zealand (IANZ)-accredited on-site drug and alcohol testing provider. The company is considered to be a leader in its field.

All NZDDA's workplace drug tests are retested at the Canterbury Health Laboratory (CHL) for the legally required independent verification. All testing is carried out to the rigorous AS/NZS4308:2008 standard. CHL's head scientist Grant Moore says, "CHL uses highly sensitive equipment which identifies individual drugs, rather than drug classes. So we can pinpoint a drug such as Ecstasy rather than listing it as an amphetamine-type substance. This is a very important safeguard as it helps ensure prescription drugs aren't confused with illegal drugs if they're in the same toxicology group."

Of the 68,561 on-site drug tests NZDDA carried out in 2012, 6.4% tested 'non-negative', an indication that the presence of a drug is detected. This is a slight decrease from the 2011 figure when 7% of tests were found to be non-negative.

Cannabis (THC) continues to be the most frequently detected drug in workplace drug screening, with 71% of the non-negative tests detecting this drug, up from 68.5% in 2011. In 2010 the figure was 70.3%. Opiates (including codeine) were detected in 18% of non-negative tests, compared with 15.9% the previous year, and 16.2% in 2010. Methamphetamine was found in 6% of non-negative tests in 2012, 9.1% in 2011 and 16.2% in 2010. Benzodiazepines

were detected in 1% of non-negative tests in 2012, down from 1.2% in 2011 and 2% in 2010. Cocaine hasn't been detected at all in tests in 2012 and 2011, and 0.2% of non-negative tests in 2010.

Mr Hilson says it's pleasing to be seeing a downward trend in the detection hard drugs such as benzodiazepines and amphetamines, and no cocaine detected in on-site workplace drug testing over the last three years.

NZDDA's 2012 statistics don't include synthetic cannabis data says Mr Hilson. "NZDDA began testing for synthetic cannabis in the latter part of last year with the introduction of FDA-approved (US Food & Drugs Administration) test strips, so our data only covers a few months and can't be included in our annual reporting. We do have, however, strong anecdotal evidence that its use is on the rise. We'll be including synthetic cannabis test results in our 2013 statistics."

Hair testing data is provided for the first time in this 2012 report. Hair testing provides evidential results which give a history of drug and/or alcohol use over the previous 90 days. Two hundred tests were conducted in 2012; 65 of those returning positive results - 38 tests detected cannabis and 29 showed up methamphetamine use. Mr Hilson says hair testing mostly takes place for 'white collar' pre-employment testing and the testing of witnesses in court, in particular the Family Court.

Workplace drug and alcohol testing takes place mostly in safety sensitive industries such as construction, forestry, freezing works, manufacturing, mining, oil and gas, transport and waste.

NZDDA's 2012 statistics analyse the test reasons (pre-employment, post-incident, re-test, random, reasonable cause or voluntary) on a national basis as well as regionally and by North/South Island, by sector and by drug type detected.

Overwhelmingly 31% of non-negative results detected are testing for 'reasonable cause'; in 2011 this was 30%. At the other end of the scale random testing records 6% of non-negative test results, up from 5% the previous year. Cannabis is detected more frequently in traditional cannabis growing areas such as Northland, the Bay of Plenty, and the North Island's east coast. Wellington also has a high cannabis usage rate.

In addition to workplace drug and alcohol testing, NZDDA also offers advanced drug and alcohol manager and training programmes, as well as assisting clients in designing and implementing workplace drug and alcohol policies.

Andrew Schirnack, partner of specialist employment law firm LangstonHudsonButcher says, "Having a carefully drafted policy that is both appropriate to the particular workplace and properly introduced is the starting point for lawful workplace drug and alcohol testing. Employers should then take care to abide by their own policies when undertaking testing. The Employment Court has made it clear that it won't tolerate employers departing from the rules they've set for themselves in policy."

NZDDA's chief executive Chris Hilson concludes, "Employers have a responsibility to provide a safe workplace for all, and in particular in safety sensitive sectors. We're heartened to see that more employers are training their managers and supervisors, and also their employees, in workplace policy planning and implementation.

"Workplace safety is vital to the health of New Zealand industry. On a personal level people's health and livelihoods are at stake. Having the ability to accurately test and identify the presence of drugs and alcohol in the workplace has got to be good for business and, ultimately, the New Zealand economy."

E N D S

Attachments:

1. Chris Hilson, chief executive, NZDDA
2. NZDDA's 2012 statistics (PDF)

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Background: New Zealand Drug Detection Agency (NZDDA)

- NZDDA supplies specialised services for companies that conduct on-site workplace drug and alcohol testing. It is considered to be the leader in its field.
- NZDDA staff are experts in the drug and alcohol testing industry; it operates a national fleet of more than 30 specialist NZDDA vehicles.
- NZDDA's national support office, based in Auckland has full IANZ-accreditation; each of NZDDA's 19 regional offices has, or is in the process of achieving, full IANZ-accreditation.
- All workplace drug and alcohol testing is carried out to the rigorous criteria of the AS/NZS4308:2008 standard.
- NZDDA's drug testing includes: cannabis (THC), opiates (including codeine), amphetamines, methamphetamine, benzodiazepine, cocaine and synthetic cannabinoids.
- Sectors in which NZDDA operates include tourism, construction, forestry, freezing works, manufacturing, mining, oil and gas, transport and waste. NZDDA is increasingly working in the white collar sector with pre-employment testing and hair testing.
- NZDDA assists companies with drug and alcohol policy implementation as well as managerial/supervisory training and employee training sessions. The company has trained more than 5,000 managers and a similar number of employees nationwide.
- Established in 2005, NZDDA is a New Zealand-owned and operated company; there are 19 branch offices throughout the country.