

Forestry for Life



Oral testing the way to go High tech tests

by Ann-Louise Anderson, a leading expert on drug testing.

According to recent studies in the US and New Zealand, the majority of drug users are employed. Drug use in workplaces cost employers many millions of dollars in NZ and in excess of \$100 billion in the USA each year.

Small companies are more vulnerable to drug use in the workplace, but conduct drug tests less than large ones. There is a plethora of ways to test for drugs — urine, hair, blood to name a few — but among these drug screening methods, the most fast and convenient one is the oral fluid (saliva) mouth swab drug test.

It is directed at the recent use of drugs and does not have the same issues as urine nor the need for bathroom facilities or rigorous precautions to detect cheating. It detects drug use regardless of the route of administration with drug metabolites or parent drug detected through oral fluids almost immediately after consumption and remains detectable whilst the person is acutely impacted by the drugs effects.

There are lots of urban legends and myths concerning drug testing, including how to cheat them and the perceived unfairness of certain sample types, but less is written about the cost of not testing.

Oral fluid, or what some may refer to as saliva drug testing, is being adopted by many New Zealand workplaces, most of whom are not waiting for the release of a joint Australia and

New Zealand Standard. The current Australian Standard is undergoing a much needed revision. This standard has withstood a number of legal challenges since it was released in 2006, despite the points needing revision.

One of the big questions is what does 'recent use' mean. I believe it is the period of time when the effect of drug consumption has acute affects on the individual's

ability to work safely, perform tasks requiring concentration, attention and have good motor skills.

As an example the scientific evidence would indicate that this is a period of between six and nine hours after consumption of a standard dose of cannabis.

Compliant saliva drug test

Gisborne and the Hawke's Bay area is well served already with saliva (OF) drug testing services available that comply with current AS4760:2006 and also the soon-to-be-released AS/NZS4760:2017. This is already being used or about to be introduced by some of the region's major industries and forward-thinking employers.

What is the oral fluid drug test and why it is done?

The oral fluid drug test is performed on a measured sample of saliva collected from a subject's mouth using a swab or similar. This may be immediately screened on site and or sent to a laboratory for analysis. Using oral fluid as the drug test sample is gaining popularity because of its fairness, speed and accuracy.

Recent studies show around 15 percent of issues in a workplace are directly related to drug and alcohol abuse.

Research has shown the accident rate for substance abusers is four times that of their co-workers, is responsible for 50 percent of all New Zealand workplace injuries and up to 40 percent of deaths. Absenteeism is also a significant problem as is the drop in productivity of between 20-25 percent causing employers and therefore employees to lose much-needed profitability.

The benefits offered by a Workplace drug testing programme are further enhanced by the addition of oral fluid as a test sample. Saliva contains traces of recently-consumed substances, so is effective for post-accident drug testing, for detecting on-the-job drug use, for reasonable suspicion and especially random testing.

It may also be used for pre-employment drug screening however in my opinion, and that of many others, is that urine is still the most effective sample for this.

Legal issues

The Health and Safety Act, and subsequent amendments, identifies drugs and alcohol as a potential hazard that requires a workplace to take measures to identify and eliminate that hazard. The most effective way to identify drug use and the direct impact on a person's performance on the job is a drug testing programme.

Oral fluid is widely used in Australian workplaces already. The release of a joint A/NZ oral fluid standard certainly gives New Zealand workplaces more incentive to look at this method.

The new year rang in a change for how random drug and alcohol testing is done for Eastland Group employees.

Jarred Moroney, general manager people and performance, said the move to oral fluid testing for random tests came once Eastland Group was confident in the accuracy of the technology.

"We have been random testing

better."

Urine tests can show drug use up to two-to-three weeks previous, depending on the frequency of use, while oral fluid is an eight-to-10 hour period of drug use depending on the type of drug.

"When we employ people, they know we have zero tolerance of drug use," says Moroney.

"It is one less risk factor, and



for about four-and-a-half years now," says Moroney.

Until December 1, 2016, that testing was done with urine. While random testing has shifted to oral, others, including reasonable cause, post incident and pre-employment still use urine.

"We haven't had a positive random result for over 22 months — and that's great because it shows the message is getting home."

Key to it all is making the work environment a safer place for all, he said.

"Oral fluids look at a smaller time frame of drug use — if an employee fails a random test, then it is likely they are under the influence, and a higher risk to us. By narrowing that band of time, it enables us to manage the risk

one we can easily control. When we initiated random drug testing across the Group, there were a few people who returned positive results — some of them have taken up the offer of support while others don't work for us any more."

Eastland Group tests about 15 people a month.

"This helps to ensure we provide a safe place to work for all our employees," said Moroney.

The Group has 110 employees, 42 work at the port including administration, floating plant team, debarker staff, land side operation and log yard staff who do the maintenance and cleaning.

"The technology available to do oral testing is so much better now. The device we use is very accurate."

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Code of practice

The case for an alcohol and drug free workplace

The purpose of the NZ Forest Owners Association (FOA) Code of Practice is to assist each and every forestry business to develop an alcohol and drugs free workplace programme tailored to its specific needs.



While the Code focuses on the 'why' and 'how' of workplace drug and alcohol testing, it must be part of a comprehensive programme involving education, training and rehabilitation in order for it to deliver the positive outcomes sought by forest owners, managers and most employees.

If the impact of alcohol and other drugs is eliminated from all forestry workplaces, it will create a healthier and safer environment for all employees, contractors and customers. It will also enhance the reputation and customer service of the plantation forest industry. Alcohol is still New Zealand's most widely used and abused drug. Overall, in the workplace, it has 10 times the impact of illicit recreational drugs, and this is reflected in the road toll and in accident rates across many industries.

Since the 1970s, cannabis abuse has been an ongoing problem for many industries, including forestry. Other depressant and hallucinogenic drugs, including LSD, heroin and benzodiazepines, have also been used, often combined with alcohol. Since the late 1990s, stimulants like methamphetamine ('speed', 'P' or 'meth'), ecstasy, fantasy, BZP and cocaine have become increasingly available. By 2008, use of these stimulants had grown to the point where they were often creating unpredictable and dangerous behaviour among users. Until recently 'legal highs' were of concern, and there are ongoing issues as new drug derivatives are continually developed.

Accident trends

Far too many people are still being injured in our forests. The FOA is determined to see a marked improvement in the rate of progress to its goal of zero serious workplace accidents. It is therefore continually reviewing everything that impacts

on safety in the forest workplace. Forest owners, contractors and other industry employers are urged to adopt it as the basis of their own alcohol and drug free workplace programmes. As the Code is based on statute law and legal precedent, there is a strong legal incentive for employers to take it seriously.

Fatalities

The forest industry has an unacceptable rate of serious harm injuries and fatalities. The Code is part of a wider initiative to address the safety culture of the industry. Workers affected by alcohol and other drugs are a hazard to their workmates and have no place on a forest site.

Benefits

A comprehensive alcohol and drug-free workplace programme will:

- Help employees play their part in creating a healthier and safer New Zealand society and assist employers to maintain their reputation as responsible citizens
- Reduce the number, type and cost of accidents, and associated medical costs
- Reduce employee turnover and the costs of recruiting and training new staff
- Reduce absenteeism, especially morning-after 'sickies'
- Reduce the incidence of non- or poor-performance due to drug use
- Reduce errors and their associated costs
- Increase customer satisfaction
- Increase the desirability of forestry as a place to work.

The Code is designed to be comprehensive, practical, and cost-effective. It is suitable for use by all forestry companies, contractors, independent saw millers and other organisations associated with the forest industry that wish to eliminate the effects of alcohol and drugs in the workplace.

Alcohol and drug free workplace programmes do not offer instant results, but if the model is applied on a systematic and sustained basis it can provide major long term benefits for the organisation and its employees.

Exert taken from the Plantation Forestry Code of Practice

Keeping two steps ahead: Eastland Wood Council

Eastland Wood Council (EWC) is two steps ahead of the pack when it comes to their new drug and alcohol policy.

The organisation is on the cusp of releasing its updated policy, which chairman Iain McInnes (pictured below) says includes everything currently on the NZFOA Code of Practice and relevant national standards, and more.

"Drug and alcohol policies have been around for a long time, and this is just us keeping up with changes in the industry," says McInnes.

EWC were one of the first in the country to introduce a register that shared data between companies, and many others followed suit.

"Positive rates in the forestry industry have plummeted over the past five years. We have seen a big improvement across the board, but perhaps more pleasing is the change in culture among the crews. Crews are very disappointed if one of their members tests positive, so that peer pressure is working in a very positive way," he says.

"That does mean some people move out of the industry, while others make lifestyle changes to become drug free."

This decision is something that has a flow-on positive for the family, whanau and the wider community, McInnes added. The new policy is set to be finalised later in February.



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Gisborne teen keen to enter forestry

Shideen Nathan-Ngaronoa (pictured) is determined to create a sustainable and strong career for herself.

The 19-year-old has seen first-hand what substance abuse can do to a life, and from a young age set about ensuring she followed a different path.

She is about to start her level 6 studies, and is already talking about the possibility of following that with a degree.

Her foray into the forestry industry came almost by chance.

"Originally I wanted to join the Navy and planned my school subjects around that," says Nathan-Ngaronoa.

But two years ago she attended the Big Day Out – Forestry Day and everything changed when she discovered the opportunities offered in management forestry planning.

"I liked what I saw. My best friend's dad is a contractor, so I worked with his crew over the holidays and then gained more experience during the 2015 planting season."

While still at Campion College, she passed the National Certificate Chainsaw Operating (level 2) through Turanga Ararau, which was followed after she left school, with the New Zealand Diploma in Forest Management (level 5). She is now about to start (level 6) through the Waiariki National Centre of Excellence for the Forest and Wood Industry (Toi Ohomai).

It has been a challenging few years juggling school and her forestry work, but Nathan-Ngaronoa says it is all worth it.

During the summer holidays she has been working on a local wood lot, operating a chainsaw, log making and

doing quality control.

This year the very driven teen is moving to Rotorua to complete the diploma and all going well, a degree will follow.

She is taking out a student loan to cover her studies, but is confident once she starts work, she will be able to pay it off quickly.

While studying in Gisborne, she lived with her dad, but in Rotorua she will be private boarding with a family she has yet to meet.

"I want to be supervisor or manager," Nathan-Ngarono says.

"I love the variety the job offers, being out in the bush on the skid site and in the office where there is more technical input. That variety keeps you excited about work."

Ideally she would love to return to Tairāwhiti once she has finished her studies but is also tempted to head offshore to see where her chosen career can take her.

It's all in the saliva

Pros of using a saliva drug test

Saliva drug tests can be more accurate in detecting methamphetamine, opiates and cocaine.

The test can detect very low levels of THC, giving it a sensitivity to recent use.

THC detection levels can eliminate detection of a worker's past use, not impacting their performance at that time.

The saliva test is non-invasive — sample collection is performed easily and there are no privacy and embarrassment issues.

The sample is easily collected with the test subject performing most of the collection themselves, needing no special bathroom facilities and with almost no instances where a person is incapable of providing a sample immediately.

The test detects drugs in the period of acute effects such as THC taken within six to nine hours.

It is very quick, with test results obtained in five to 10 minutes.

The chances of adulteration or tampering or manipulation of the sample — often attempted in urine drug testing — are minimal.

The saliva test device itself is more expensive than the urine one, but it saves time and does not require special facilities, meaning in most cases it is more cost-effective.

It also targets recent use of cannabis meaning weekend or out-of-work consumption is not relevant or detected.

Cons

A mouth swab drug test can only detect drugs that are consumed within short periods of time (usually eight to 72 hours, depending on the drug used).

The vast majority of available saliva drug test kits follow varying measurement cut-offs and therefore do not and will not comply with current or revised standards.

Urine as a sample for pre-employment drug testing remains the most cost-effective.

The forestry industry is awaiting the release of AS/NZS4760:2017 later this year. However, the current AS4760:2006 has withstood a legal challenge and can be used now in New Zealand.

It is more expensive per test than urine screening.



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