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# Hangovers a hassle

Companies are clamping down on people who front up to work drunk or drugged, writes **Amanda Horswill**

**W**EEKEND partying is causing hangovers for already staff-strapped employers forced to stand staff down for testing positive for drugs or alcohol.

Drug Arm Centre for Addiction Research and Education director Caroline Salom says an increasing number of companies are adopting drug and alcohol screening programs as part of their workplace health and safety efforts.

The most common drugs detected are the so-called recreational types – such as marijuana and alcohol.

Salom says that is because workers underestimate the length of time their weekend drinking and drug-taking can remain in their system.

"I am quite certain most workers don't understand the impact," Salom says.

"We do a lot of work developing policies and educating staff and supervisors about why it's important companies address drug and alcohol in the workplace.

"We talk about the implications and you can see them going: 'Oh, really?' When they hear that THC – the active ingredient in cannabis – can be detected months afterwards depending on the heaviness and frequency of use and that, if it's still in your bloodstream, it can mean you are still affected, they are surprised.

"They think that when you get past the intoxication stage then the effects are finished but they haven't," she says.

Drug screening program company Frontline Diagnostics' managing director Michael White says marijuana and alcohol are the most common types of drugs detected in workplace testing.

"Ice is also becoming more prevalent but is still much lower than marijuana," White says.

"Alcohol is getting worse due to teenage binge drinking.

"This being said, we don't come across too many people who come to work still drunk, although statistics show that 4 per cent of workers have gone to work drunk.

"We regularly come across between 12 and 15 per cent drug use in Queensland workplaces, which is the same average as other states.

"Some of the overall patterns we have noticed are marijuana and ecstasy for bar workers (the industry with the most dealers), speed for truck drivers and marijuana and speed for the mining industry," he says.

Salom and White say the best way to beat drugs at work is through education.

"The big stick approach doesn't work. All that does is get people's backs up," Salom says.

"Most adults will realise that they need to change their behaviour if they want to keep their job.

"If we put it to them in such a way that explains the drug tests are there for health and safety reasons – and state a case why circumstances need to change – then you can engage people," she says.

White says workers need to stop drinking at least 10 hours before going to work.

"If the worker is binge drinking, alcohol effects will take longer to disappear," White says.

"It is really important to tell workers what the impact of consuming drugs on the weekend may have at work.

"During the education program, we show them what drugs do to their brain and how the brain affects the whole body, whether the drugs were consumed at work or on the weekend.

"We explain the short-term and long-term effects of drugs," he says.

- **Breathalyser:** Handheld machine where subject blows into straw attached to analysing device. Detects alcohol.
- **Urine:** Screening wick is placed in subject's sample, findings displayed on a small screen. Detects alcohol, opiates (heroin, codeine); THC (marijuana, cannabis); amphetamines (speed); methamphetamine (ecstasy, MDMA); cocaine; Benzodiazepine (sleeping tablets/valium). Confirmed with laboratory test, which measures level of drug.
- **Saliva:** Thermometer-style wick wiped across tongue and then placed under tongue for several minutes. Findings displayed on small screen. Detects same drugs as urine testing.
- **Laboratory confirmation testing:** To quantify the amount of drug/s present, the urine sample is sent to an accredited laboratory for Gas Chromatography/Mass Spectrometry analysis. Once the drug has been confirmed through lab analysis, it is referred to as a "positive" sample.
- **Source:** [frontlinediagnostics.com.au/screening.php](http://frontlinediagnostics.com.au/screening.php)

