

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Frontline Diagnostics calls for more workplace drug testing**

Mandatory drug testing in the workplace has been excluded from most of Australia's organisational health and safety regulations, according to drug and alcohol testing and screening specialist Frontline Diagnostics.

Frontline Diagnostics Managing Director Michael White said not enough Australian industries have implemented drug and alcohol testing programs and this needs to change.

"Most drug-safe programs have been implemented in the safety-sensitive industries such as transport, mining and engineering," White said.

"The mining industry is definitely leading in Australia. It wants to be seen as a forerunner worldwide in terms of OH&S issues and so it introduced the Mine Health and Safety Act in 2004. The Act stipulates that mines should introduce a policy or at least address the issue of drugs in the workplace," he explained.

Some of the other industries Frontline Diagnostics has worked with throughout the years are the construction, aviation, food, manufacturing industries, theme parks, dock-side cargo handling and cruise ships.

According to White, most managers are oblivious to drug use and drug impairment at work.

"It's not easy to monitor the presence of drugs at work, yet 70 per cent of drug users in Australia are employed. Organisations need to remember that a reputation for drug use will kill a business just as fast as it will kill a drug user," Michael said.

"For example, when a mine contractor is known or identified as a drug sympathetic business through a drug screening program, it is banned from the site and will be overlooked for future tenders. As many mining and other similar industry contractors rely on the regular flow of contracts to survive, this reputation for drug use can really kill their business.

"Another example is the one of a Sydney-based courier company which got a reputation for its drivers and office staff using and distributing drugs. It was never proven but the suggestion that it could be true put the business into receivership within a few weeks," he added.

White said any Drug-Safe Workplace program should be communicated throughout a company so as to ensure management, staff and unions feel comfortable with its

development and implementation. It is also important to choose appropriately the right type of testing devices.

One of them is the oral or saliva device, which is only suitable where alternate screening options are not appropriate, such as on the roadside. They are inaccurate for the detection of marijuana and can't detect drugs in the Valium, Serapax family (benzodiazepines) except in extremely large quantities.

In addition, whilst cannabis affects users for several hours after consumption, oral screening devices only have a short window of detection for marijuana of about two hours. This means that the devices are generally useless for identifying anyone who has consumed cannabis earlier such as the night before.

Another type of screening is with urine which requires a sample to be taken in a toilet facility. This testing is very quick and accurate and has been the preferred screen used in the field.

White established Frontline Diagnostics in 1999 to provide Australian industry with a complete solution for the detection, management and control of alcohol and other drugs in the workplace.

White has experienced first-hand how drug use can be overlooked in the workplace and the damaging consequences.

"Prior to setting up Frontline Diagnostics I worked with a business partner in pharmaceutical promotions for 15 years. We had a great working relationship and I was unaware that he was a heroin addict until he overdosed and passed away after 12 years of using the drug," White said.

"It was then that I decided I wanted to work towards creating a drug-safe Australia. Using my background in pharmaceuticals, I started Frontline Diagnostics to provide a testing and screening service as well as assistance in policy development for companies to lessen the impact of drug and alcohol use in the workplace," he said.

Frontline Diagnostics tested about 65,000 workers throughout 2007.

"The percentage of workers testing positive has been fairly similar from one year to another, but the incidence of ICE has increased sharply and overtaken ecstasy. This being said, marijuana is still the most common drug found in the workplace," White explained.

"From our experience, it is not unusual to find 15 percent substance abuse in the workplace. The objective of a Drug-Safe Workplace program is to show the non-users that they can take control of their own welfare and assist workmates to actively eliminate alcohol and other drugs from the workplace," he added.

According to White, drug screening methods are generally the same around the world and Australia is equal to if not ahead of the world's best practice.

Frontline Diagnostics services include complete drug screening and testing with results analysis and comprehensive reporting; policy development support for regulating alcohol and other drugs at the workplace; education workshops and training; purpose-built mobile clinics plus referral to accredited employee assistance providers.

Frontline Diagnostics operates with mobile clinics which provide a safe and hygienic solution that are set up and ready for testing immediately upon arrival.

Frontline Diagnostics will hold a series of workshops in Sydney, Canberra, Wollongong, Newcastle, Brisbane and Melbourne throughout 2008 to educate Australian employers about the prevalence and impact of drugs at work and how to develop policies to ensure a drug-safe workplace.

Frontline Diagnostics is also a founding member of the Drug-Safe Australia Foundation.

For more information about Frontline Diagnostics, call 1800 888 852 or visit [www.frontlinediagnostics.com.au](http://www.frontlinediagnostics.com.au).

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