

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Drug taking in the workplace - the hidden issue**

Despite the fact that over 70 per cent of drug users in Australia are employed, some organisations are unaware of a drug and alcohol problem that might exist in their workplace.

According to drug and alcohol screening specialist Frontline Diagnostics, the percentage of workers testing positive to a drug and alcohol screening process has been fairly similar from one year to another.

“We regularly come across between 12 to 15 per cent drug use in any workplace around the country,” said Michael White, Managing Director of Frontline Diagnostics.

“Statistics show that about 10 per cent of companies in Australia do pre-employment drug testing. However, if we follow the USA, which has a strong drug screening history, we will be running pre-employment screening in approximately 60 per cent of businesses within five years or so.

“Under the Occupational Health and Safety acts, there is a legal requirement for Australian employers to mitigate risk in the workplace. The creation of well-documented OH&S policies that include a ‘drug-safe’ section can help,” he added.

White explained some of the impacts drug use can have on the safety and productivity of the workplace.

“The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that 20 to 25 per cent of occupational injuries are a result of drug and alcohol use. Drug users file five times more workers compensation claims than non-users, but eight out of 10 victims of serious drug-related accidents are the innocent bystanders,” White said.

“In addition, drug users are more likely to take time off work, leading to an increased workload on their workmates and decrease in productivity,” he added.

Frontline Diagnostics’ testing results for 2007 showed that marijuana has remained the most commonly found drug during screening processes. ICE is also becoming more prevalent but it is still much lower than marijuana.

“We don’t come across too many people who come to work still drunk, although statistics show that four per cent of workers have gone to work still under the influence of alcohol,” he explained.

“Generally speaking, workers need to stop drinking 10 hours before going to work. If the worker is binge drinking, alcohol and its effects will take longer to disappear,” he added.

White said it is difficult to judge whether or not a colleague has been consuming drugs.

“Some of the signs related to this behaviour such as increased absenteeism, fatigue, a sudden drop in productivity and a decrease in attention to detail can also be linked to many other non-drug related issues. Therefore, it is very important not to accuse an employee of having taken drugs simply because they look tired,” he said.

According to White, the best way to ascertain if there is a substance abuse issue in the workplace is to have a robust Drug-Safe Workplace policy in place and to educate the workforce.

“Business owners need to approach this issue in an open and honest manner, explain the expectations of the company and the consequences of the behaviour,” he said.

“It is really important to tell workers what the impact of consuming drugs on the weekend may have at work. A key element of any Drug-Safe Workplace programme is education.

“During our education programme, we show employees 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 added.

Frontline Diagnostics offers various education and awareness programmes including: alcohol & other drug awareness workshop, new employees and contractors drug awareness programme, fit for work assessment (for supervisors and managers) as well as OH&S committee consultation.

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.

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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