



Industry leads way with drug-safe workplaces

The mining industry is at the forefront of Australian workplace safety with about 70 per cent of Australia's 380 mines having a drug-safe workplace program in place, according to drug and alcohol testing and screening specialist Frontline Diagnostics.

Managing director Michael White says Frontline Diagnostics has worked with about 80 to 100 mines since its founding in 1999.

"The Australian mining industry 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," Mr White says.

"The Act stipulates that mines should introduce a policy or at least address the issue of drugs in the workplace."

Mr White says mines which have introduced a drug-safe workplace program have had a significant decline in the rates of people testing positive.

"In our experience, mines with a proper drug-safe workplace policy and regular drug testing have about 4 per cent of their staff testing positive to drug and alcohol screening.

"This is in comparison to 17-20 per cent for mines which have not introduced a policy or testing. These mines attract drug-users because staff are generally aware of which mines do not enforce a policy."

Mr White says Frontline Diagnostics got astounding results when the company worked with mines in New South Wales to run 7,000 tests over a year.

"At the beginning of the year, 17 per cent of the mines staff tested positive to our drug and alcohol screening. By the end of the 12 months, only 1.8 per

cent tested positive. This is a huge decrease."

According to Mr White, the first step in implementing a drug-safe workplace policy is making sure it is user-friendly.

"It is also important to find an experienced screening company because spending hours every day on drug and alcohol screening costs mines a lot of money and time."

Mr White says one of the challenges Frontline Diagnostics sometimes encounters is getting everyone to reach agreement.

"One of the challenges we face is making sure that everyone in the mining company – including management, staff and unions – understand and agree with the proper type of testing.

"We have had great success in talking one-on-one with mine management as they usually know what their drug and alcohol problems are. It is then easier for us to develop proper testing and tailored education workshops for staff."

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 and referral to accredited employee assistance providers.

For more information, call 1800 888 852 or visit www.frontlinediagnostics.com.au. ■

• Drug-Safe workshops - *Safety* page 59.

