



Heading: Workplace drug and alcohol testing technology: balancing safety with support

Graham Hurst, Marketing Manager – Impairment, Draeger Safety UK, discusses how technological advancements in drug and alcohol testing are further supporting our emergency services' health and wellbeing.

Our emergency services perform stressful jobs and encounter high levels of risk while tackling fires, fighting crime and attending incidents, and they do an outstanding job.

Their employers have a duty of care to support their health and wellbeing, which includes a due diligence to help ensure that drugs and alcohol do not have an adverse effect on not just their ability to perform their roles, but also on their overall health.

Due to the availability of alcohol, it is an area which benefits from periodic monitoring. For the vast majority this would never be an issue, but for some the ill-effects of social drinking, recreational drug misuse and in very extreme cases even drug or alcohol reliance and addiction need to be understood.

In the workplace, even low levels of drugs and alcohol can lead to impaired decision making, increased co-worker fractions, absenteeism, poor health, and risks to the safety of personnel and our communities. So, it stands to reason also that an organisation has a responsibility to make sure these elements don't impact on their work force and affect overall employee health and the ability to protect the public. Indeed, under the Safety, Health and Welfare Act, 2005, companies are obliged to provide a safe place to work as far as reasonably practical – drug and alcohol testing is a useful support to an organisation's commitment to upholding this duty.

However, testing people for drug and alcohol work-based impairment only tells one part of the story. Understanding why this happens is critical in supporting our Emergency Services' health and wellbeing. Accurately testing and monitoring for signs of addiction and abuse is not just for the safety and protection of individuals and the public – and certainly not simply because they should be disciplined – but it can provide an early alert to bigger and more complex problems and difficulties. Understanding these helps us to protect long-term health and wellbeing, as well as preventing people putting themselves and others at risk.

Testing technology

Up until recently urine testing has been the norm. Current thinking however understands that this form of testing falls short for a number of reasons. Requesting urine samples can cause delays in obtaining results, is intrusive, and potentially open to abuse, with samples being diluted with water, bought online or swapped. The results can also be inaccurate since they reflect a person's overall lifestyle and previous

drug use, rather than current impairment. Many employers utilise the services of third-party companies to undertake testing which in itself builds in delays and a level of uncertainty.

Oral fluid and breath testing technology has long-been used in Australia and the US and is now being used in the UK by employers and being administered in house to address these issues with highly-accurate, rapid and hygienic results. An important advantage is that samples are relatively easy to obtain, and testing can be carried out with minimal training for staff and easily observed, meaning it is less susceptible to adulteration. Oral fluid drug tests can also be compact and used anywhere whilst providing data capture for auditing purposes – useful for workplace testing.

Using Dräger's Oral fluid drug testing devices as an example, you analyse a saliva sample for parent drugs and metabolites, such as opiates, cocaine, cannabinoids, amphetamines and designer drugs. Drug detection times are just 5 to 48 hours, compared with 1.5 to 4 days for urine testing, therefore meaning they are indicative of very recent drug consumption. Devices are easy to use and onsite testing can provide immediate results with negative donors returning to work immediately. Non-negative results will require laboratory testing to determine the exact substance and concentration.

Dräger's alcohol breath testing devices provide precise and immediate results and include data storage for fast access to previous test results.

Extensively used by the emergency services, Dräger also works with third parties to help provide organisations with policies that address how people with positive results are treated and what is best practice in subsequently supporting their health and wellbeing.

Supporting our emergency services

It is Dräger's belief that drug and alcohol testing should be in support of our emergency Services health and wellbeing, and not necessarily be linked to a zero tolerance policy where the only conclusion to a positive result is dismissal. Rather, support should be provided to find out the cause of a positive test; perhaps a family breakdown or illness, and whether this could be a one-off or a sustained problem.

Dräger has been providing the Emergency Services with drug and alcohol testing for over 60 years, and the testing technology it has developed contributes towards its overall goal of developing 'Technology for Life'.

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