

Workplace Drug Testing

Edited by Alain Verstraete



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A New Zealand perspective

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Key points

New Zealand (NZ) companies have been introducing drug and alcohol-free workplace policies and programmes, including testing, since 1992. This chapter covers the following key topics:

- history of workplace drug testing in New Zealand and related industry trends
- the legislative issues and some relevant case law
- the medico-legal testing requirements (i.e. testing to the latest version, currently 2008, of the Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 4308: 'Procedures for specimen collection and the detection and quantitation of drugs of abuse in urine')
- legally robust workplace drug and alcohol policies and the associated procedures
- NZ drug abuse trends and statistics relevant to workplace positive tests
- status of oral fluid testing.

Introduction

Most 'safety-critical' industry sectors are now embracing drug and alcohol testing as part of comprehensive programmes which also have a strong focus on education and rehabilitation. Lawful drug testing in New Zealand should be conducted to the strict medico-legal requirements of the most recent Australian/New Zealand Standard, AS/NZS 4308 'Procedures for specimen collection and the detection and quantitation of drugs of abuse in urine'.¹ This chapter gives an overview of the NZ experience, highlighting the mix of testing options employed, the industry sector trends, the categories of drugs misused, the influence of significant Employment Court judgments, the

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changes in the 2008 version of AS/NZS 4308 and current position of oral fluid testing.

It is important to emphasise that some of the figures referred to relate to the statistics from tests conducted by the Institute of Environmental Science and Research Limited (ESR). ESR is a Crown Research Institute (CRI), and is considered to be a New Zealand leader in providing analytical services and advice related to drug and alcohol-free workplaces. The laboratory is accredited to provide testing services in compliance with AS/NZS 4308.

History

New Zealand has a population of 4.3 million. The introduction of workplace drug testing as part of a company's drug and alcohol-free workplace programme (DAFWP) commenced in the early 1990s. Initially this was in response to US companies requiring their global subsidiaries to adopt policies and procedures which mirrored the US programmes. In 1992 the NZ Navy also introduced drug testing programmes and the other Armed Forces followed. During the mid to late 1990s, the industries which pioneered DAFWP programmes that included testing were in the forestry, fishing, mining and aluminium manufacturing sectors. Since 2000 most of the other 'risk' industry sectors have introduced organisations with comprehensive programmes in place.

Figure 15.1 shows the increase in workplace drug testing urine specimens tested by ESR from June 1998 to June 2006. In 2006 there were other agencies (both laboratory and 'on-site' screening) providing testing services and the author estimates that the total number of tests for 2005/2006 was at least twice the ESR statistics (i.e. greater than 60 000). Since 2006 there has been a significant increase in workplace drug testing and the total number of tests conducted during 2009 is estimated to be greater than 100 000. While many of these tests are conducted in full compliance with AS/NZS

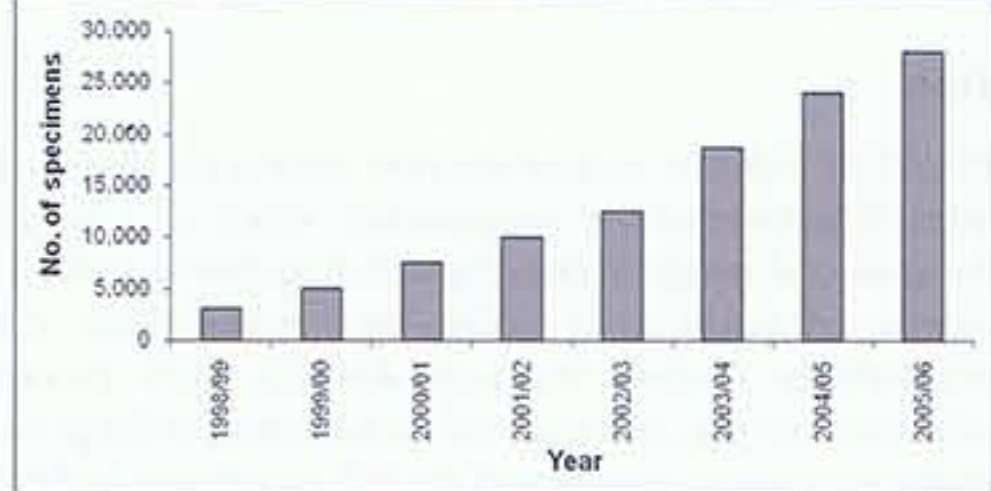


Figure 15.1 Workplace drug testing urine specimens analysed by ESR between June 1998 and June 2006.

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This comprehensive text provides clear explanations of the effects of drugs on human performance and the need for workplace drug testing. It provides essential information on the regulatory and legal frameworks around the world, how to set policies and coverage of all aspects of drug analysis and the associated interpretation of results.

Contents include:

- epidemiology of drug use in the working population
- the evidence base and guidelines for workplace drug testing
- legal, regulatory aspects and policies for drugs and alcohol
- urine and alternative sample collection process
- analytical techniques and specimen adulteration.

Case studies of successful programmes are also included to illustrate the principles discussed.

Written by internationally acknowledged experts this informative book will be essential reading for anyone interested in workplace drug testing or setting up such a system including clinical and forensic toxicologists, occupational health physicians, nurses, human resources, drug counselling and treatment providers, analytical chemists and lawyers.

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