

Synthetic marijuana and workplace drug testing

Drug and alcohol testing in the workplace has seen a marked increase across Australia in the last twelve months.

This growth is largely driven by employer concerns about alcohol and drug related risk to continuing workplace safety and productivity.

OHS professionals play a key role in the development and implementation of workplace drug and alcohol programmes.

To ensure the program is carried out effectively, it is vital workplaces stay up to date with industry trends.

Currently an increased prevalence of synthetic cannabis, marketed under names such as Spice, Kronik and K2 is evident.

Producing a similar effect to marijuana, these products are considered dangerous as they can trigger psychosis and have prolonged adverse effects.

What are synthetic cannabinoids?

The National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC) explains on its website that synthetic cannabinoids are manufactured chemicals that are designed to activate the same chemical systems in the brain as the main active constituent of cannabis, delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

Some of the reported negative effects associated with use include the following:

- » Dry mouth;
- » Vomiting;
- » Seizures;
- » Agitation and aggression;
- » Elevated blood pressure/heart rate and chest pains; and,
- » Relapse of psychotic disorders.

Manufacturers are continually changing and altering the chemical make-up of the synthetic drug, making the substance very difficult to detect.

The substances found in synthetic marijuana are banned from importation in Australia.

While synthetic cannabis was created to exploit loopholes in various state laws, the TGA banned all variations of synthetic cannabinoids in July 2012.



An effective workplace drug policy should adapt to emerging trends.

Despite this, synthetic marijuana remains increasingly common and is used in Australian workplaces.

While it is a banned substance, it is not listed in the AS4308:2008 drug classes where substances such as marijuana, opiates and amphetamines are listed.

“Synthetic Marijuana is certainly an interesting substance to find due to the fact is it so indeterminate.

While it may be similar to marijuana in its mimic-like effects it is very different in composition and make-up,” said LaneWorkSafe National Sales Manager Kara Lane.

“It is known that manufacturers of this banned substance continually change and alter the ingredients, making it difficult for on-site drug screening devices to test for this substance.”

Testing

LaneWorkSafe is a leading supplier of policy, programs and on-site testing devices and one of the only companies

in Australia to have introduced an on-site device that can accurately detect for synthetic cannabinoids.

Similar to a standard drug test, a tester simply places the Synthetic Cannabis Test in a urine specimen for 30 seconds, removes the device and waits 5–6 minutes for a result to appear.

“This device is sophisticated enough to look for the two main ingredients in the substance – JWH-018 and JWH-073 – making it one of the most accurate devices on the market. It provides a simple and reliable solution to the detection of synthetic marijuana in Australian workplaces,” said Ms Lane.

There are many factors to consider that make a successful workplace drug and alcohol policy or program. Testing for synthetic cannabinoids should be considered due to its popularity among workers.

One of the biggest challenges companies face is a lack of awareness and understanding of recent trends and how best to adapt to them. **P**

For more information on the testing available visit www.laneworksafe.com.au