

MEDIA RELEASE

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Drug use posing testing challenges for resource employers: national survey

AMMA – Australia's resource industry employer group

EMPLOYERS in Australia's mining and oil and gas sectors are under increasing pressure to manage the impacts of drugs and alcohol in the workplace as society's general use and acceptance of illicit and prescription substances increases, according to national survey results released today.

The [AMMA 2016 Drug and Alcohol Testing Survey](#) reports qualitative and quantitative survey responses from 53 Australian resource employers, and also reveals only 40% of respondents test for synthetic cannabis amid concerns about the ability of testing to keep up with rapidly changing substances.

Presenting the findings at the Ports Australia Conference in Melbourne today, AMMA's director of workplace relations, Amanda Mansini says while employers are effectively managing the workplace risks, increased societal use of both illicit and prescription drugs is creating challenges.

"Despite most resource employers recording low instances of positive or non-negative tests, convincing employees to make sensible lifestyle choices outside the workplace remains a significant challenge in managing the potential impact of drugs and alcohol," Ms Mansini says.

"Employers are communicating the message but find a small portion are not taking into account the risks that using drugs outside the workplace presents to their safety and their colleagues' safety once on site.

"It is also telling that at least 50% of respondents reported that employment laws and union opposition have impacted on their ability to implement the drug and alcohol testing policy of their choice.

"The results back AMMA's longstanding position that as the people responsible for creating a safe work environment, employers and site managers must be supported in choosing the drug and alcohol testing policies and procedures that they deem most suitable for their individual workplaces."

The feedback of resource employers follows an August 2016 Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission [study](#) which found the number of national illicit drug arrests increased by 19.5% in 2014-15, while wastewater analysis indicated methamphetamine ('ice') use in the community has increased since 2009-10.

Key findings from AMMA's report include that 65% of respondents take a 'zero tolerance' tolerance approach to drugs and alcohol in the workplace, while 26% adopt a 'harm minimisation' approach, weighing each incidence on the unique circumstances and risk.

Urine testing (90% of respondents) and breath testing (88%) were widely used on Australia's mine sites, with 41% using saliva testing.

Other top challenges described by respondents include:

- Employees using masking agents or 'fake' urine samples in an attempt to 'beat the system'.
- Employees not realising the importance of declaring prescription medication.
- Uncertainty around Australian Standards for saliva testing, raising practical and legal concerns.
- Maintaining education and awareness among transient contractor workforces.

"Resource employers clearly take the health and wellbeing of their employees incredibly seriously, with drug and alcohol policies a critical part of achieving a 'zero harm' workplace," Ms Mansini says.

"This rapidly evolving area requires a multi-pronged approach involving community education and awareness, effective testing, and laws and regulations that support employers' decision making."

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