



Kronic hits NZ workplaces

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Business

Cannabis-like compounds, such as Kronic, are present in New Zealand workplaces, according to random drug testing in one industry. Eleven random samples out of 42 taken from New Zealand workers in an industry with critical safety requirements have tested positive for the synthetic cannabinoids, which mimic the effects of cannabis.

While the sample is small - Kirk Hardy of NZ Drug Detection Agency says he is awaiting results on 50 more samples - the hit rate is more than two-and-a-half times that of all other compounds tested for combined. Hardy, who was not prepared to disclose the industry tested, said random samples taken would usually produce positive results in around 10 per cent of cases. It was possible that workers were aware there were no facilities for testing for the synthetic substances in New Zealand and were using them in preference to others with testing available.

Hardy said the tests provided real evidence that there were people in the workplace who were willing to put themselves and others at risk of being seriously hurt or killed from using these drugs. He said he hoped to have testing facilities operating here in the next few months. That would also cut the cost of testing for employers dramatically, he said. "In the industries we test you don't necessarily get a second chance if things go wrong. Employees have to concentrate and just can't afford to be at risk of being impaired."

Matthew Beattie, chief executive of workplace behavioural healthcare company Instep, said the figures "don't look good," Beattie said employers had a responsibility to keep the workplace safe, but also to help employees look after themselves. "The rapidly escalating use of Kronic, Dream, Spice, K2 and other synthetic cannabis products now has major implications in the New Zealand workplace," he said.

While synthetic cannabis was currently a legal drug, its use posed significant risks, he said. For an employer it was not about legal or illegal, but safety and managing workplace risk. "We believe that employers need to take a strong position on the issue of synthetic drugs at work."

Hardy said his company worked closely with high-risk industries such as aviation, transport, civil engineering and mining in employee drug testing. Kronic and others are anecdotally known to be much more potent than illegal cannabis. Hardy said that he had seen up to 20 times stronger effects from Kronic users. "Employers need to draw a line in the sand now. Using the analogy of alcohol which is of course also readily accessible employers must take a stand."

Instep's Beattie recommends that businesses alter their workplace policies to include the ability to test for the presence of synthetic drugs. For some workplaces this would involve consultation with unions, he said.

Amendments are expected in the next few weeks to the Misuse of Drugs Act to make synthetic cannabis a Class D restricted substance. In May, drug testing providers to Australia's mining industry announced they were also in the process of setting up drug testing facilities for synthetic cannabinoids.