

DRIVER DRUG TESTING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Introduction

Research shows that consumption of certain illegal drugs can negatively impact upon the driving task in a similar manner to alcohol impairment. There is significant evidence that many drivers killed or injured on our roads have drugs other than alcohol in their bodies at the time of the crash. South Australian statistics show that in 2005, 23% of driver and rider fatalities tested positive for Cannabis, methylamphetamine or a combination of these drugs.

Driver Drug Testing

Legislation to introduce roadside driver drug testing into South Australia became operative on 1 July, 2006. With the introduction of the legislation a dedicated trial was established by South Australia Police (SAPOL) in partnership with the Department of Transport, Energy and Infrastructure (DTEI) to examine all facets of the regime over a 12 month period. A dedicated group of 13 traffic members was formed and conducted driver drug testing full time over the trial period.

The legislation made it an offence to drive or attempt to drive a motor vehicle while a prescribed drug was present in your oral fluid or blood. The drugs prescribed were:

- Methylamphetamine (Speed)
- Delta 9 –Tetrahydrocannabinol

On 8 September 2006 a third drug, 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA or Ecstasy) was added to the list of drugs.

The regime established a 3 step process to determine the presence of a drug. The process included:

- Screening test
- Oral fluid analysis or blood test
- Laboratory confirmation.

Equipment used to conduct a screening test was a Drugwipe Twin II manufactured by Securetec.

Equipment to conduct an oral fluid analysis was a Cozart RapiScan manufactured by Cozart.

Trial Results

10,097 drivers were tested over the 12 month trial with 294 driver or 1 in every 34 confirmed positive to one or more of the drugs being tested. A break down of the results showed that:

- 127 drivers positive to Methylamphetamine
- 77 drivers positive to Cannabis (THC)
- 9 drivers positive to Ecstasy
- 81 drivers positive to a combination of two or more drugs.

Of the 81 drivers that had more than one drug in their bodies:

- 64 drivers had both Methylamphetamine and Cannabis (THC)
- 10 drivers had both Methylamphetamine and Ecstasy
- 2 drivers had both Ecstasy and Cannabis (THC)
- 5 drivers had all 3 drugs

A further 2 drivers refused to undertake the test and 2 drivers were detected twice.

Expansion

The success of the trial saw the SA Government commit \$11.1 million dollars over 4 years for the expansion of the driver drug testing regime in South Australia.

The expansion of driver drug testing is primarily based on the use of 260 traffic enforcement section officers situated throughout the State performing driver drug testing duties. The model moves away from the centralised model currently established in SAPOL and other Jurisdictions in Australia where all operations are under the one command. This enables driver drug testing to be

conducted in a similar fashion to random breath testing in that tests can be conducted in multiple locations at any one time and coordinated independently of each other.

The expansion model retains the existing 13 officers in the full-time Driver Drug Testing Group (centralised model) to supplement and support service level and corporate testing operations.

Since February 2008, SAPOL has been delivering training to traffic enforcement officers across the State on driver drug testing. Members have been completing a one day course to conduct a screening test and for officers trained to conduct an oral fluid analysis, a further 4 days. Additionally, some general duty country officers have been trained in the one day screening course to support the traffic enforcement officers based in the country.

The trained officers have been independently testing drivers for drugs since April, 2008.

Conclusion

The introduction of driver drug testing and the subsequent expansion occurring in South Australia is helping to achieve goals set in the South Australia Police Road Safety Strategy 2006-2010 and the SA Road Safety Action Plan 2008-2010. The strategy and plan aim to achieve a reduction by 40% in road fatalities by 2010 and reduction in serious injury crashes to less than 995 people a year.

Tougher legislation and tougher policing are in line with the SA Road Safety Action Plan 2008-2010. Since 1 July 2008 the fine for a first offence drug driving has risen from \$313 to \$430. At the same time, all blood from drivers as a result of compulsory blood testing in hospitals as a result of a crash will also be tested for the 3 illegal drugs as well as alcohol. In conjunction with this a significant print and television media campaign was conducted by the Motor Accident Commission (MAC) throughout June 2008.

It is anticipated that SAPOL will achieve approximately 40,000 driver drug tests in the 2008/2009 year.

References

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