

CHANGING TRENDS OF DRUG DRIVING DETECTIONS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

Research shows that the consumption of certain illegal drugs can negatively impact upon the driving task in a similar manner to alcohol impairment. In July 2006 the South Australian Parliament proclaimed legislation making it an offence to drive or attempt to drive a motor vehicle while a proscribed drug is present in your oral fluid or blood.

The drugs proscribed pursuant to this legislation were:

- Methylamphetamine (Speed)
- Delta 9 –Tetrahydrocannabinol
- 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA or Ecstasy)

Over the 6 years that South Australia police (SAPOL) have been testing drivers for drugs there has been a significant increase in the detection rates of drivers identified with drugs in their oral fluid or blood. In 2009/2010, SAPOL detected more drivers with cannabis in their system than any other drug. In the two year period from 1 July 2009 the detection rate for both cannabis and methylamphetamine was the same.

This paper will outline the results achieved by the driver drug testing regime established in South Australia and the changing trends in drug detection patterns observed during 2011/2012.

METHOD

The regime introduced in South Australia established a 3 step process to determine the presence of a proscribed drug primarily using oral fluid. The process included:

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

Equipment used to conduct a screening test is a Drugwipe Twin II manufactured by Securetec Detektion-Systeme AG in Germany. Equipment to conduct an oral fluid analysis is a Cozart Drug

Detection System (DDS) manufactured by Concateno in the United Kingdom.

At the conclusion of the screening process, all positive samples are sent to a forensic laboratory for confirmation of the presence of a proscribed drug.

The regime established in South Australia operates with a full time driver drug testing group of 13 members undertaking 12,000 drug tests of drivers a year. In addition to these members operating full time, other traffic enforcement members across the jurisdiction undertake driver drug testing duties on an ad hoc basis, undertaking an additional 28,000 tests. There are presently 615 officers trained to conduct a drug screening test and of those trained, 328 officers are further trained to undertake oral fluid analyses.

2012 is the fourth year of the decentralised testing model established in South Australia. A total of 40,000 drivers have been tested for drugs each year in South Australia since 2008.

RESULTS

The results achieved in South Australia can be described as nothing but a success. Over 190,000 drivers have now been screened for a proscribed drug with over 6,700 drivers confirmed positive.

The 2011/2012 year has seen a significant change in the detection rates between the various drugs detected as highlighted in Figure one. Figure one also highlights the pronounced increase in the detection rate to methylamphetamine during 2011/2012.

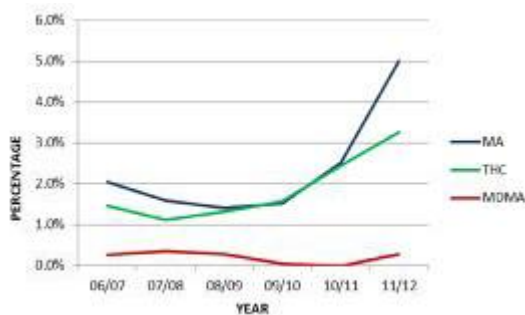


Figure One *Proscribed Drug Detection Rates in South Australia*

An analysis of the percentage of proscribed drugs of all positives detected (Figure two) also shows the pronounced increase in the detection of methylamphetamine. Whilst the overall volume of all drugs detected has increased (Figure one), Figure two highlights the significant decrease in the percentage of cannabis being detected in 2011/2012 from all positive samples.

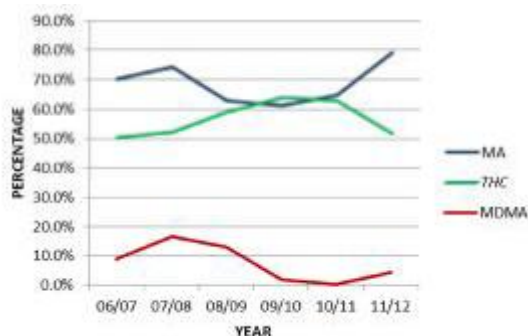


Figure Two *Percentage of Proscribed Drugs of All Positives Detected*

During 2011/2012 period the detection rate of methylamphetamine has increased by 14.6% compared to the previous year and the detection rate to cannabis has decreased by 11%. Of note was the emergence to ecstasy in the same period which had not been detected in drivers in South Australia for nearly 3 years.

The percentage of poly drug use also increased across the combination of proscribed drug categories compared to the previous 12 months. This was predominantly seen due to the emergence of ecstasy, but a 10.6% increase was noted in the combination of methylamphetamine and THC compared to the previous year.

In 2011/2012 1 in every 16 drivers tested for a proscribed drug was positive. SAPOL saw a 38% increase in the number of drivers detected with a proscribed drug compared to the previous year. This increase was on top of a 35% increase experienced the previous year.

There is no conclusive evidence as to why the increase in methylamphetamine and decrease in THC detections are being observed. It is possible that the emergence of synthetic cannabinoids may be a contributing factor. The overall increase in the detection rate of proscribed drugs in drivers is attributed, not to the fact that more people are drug driving, but to the enforcement efforts being undertaken by SAPOL.

CONCLUSION

With a population base of 1.68 million people, SAPOL has been screening drivers for proscribed drugs per 100,000 population, approximately 4 times greater than any other Australian jurisdiction. That rate is set to increase with the number of drivers to be screened in South Australia during 2012/2013 increasing to 47,000 tests a year.

The introduction of driver drug testing and the subsequent expansion which occurred in 2008 is helping to achieve goals set in the South Australia Police Road Safety Strategy 2011-2014 and the SA Road Safety Strategy 2020, Towards Zero Together.

Drivers who drive after the consumption of a proscribed drug are identified as dangerous drivers and SAPOL will continue to actively enforce this part of our legislation in an effort to help reduce road crashes.

REFERENCES

1. Towards Zero Together, South Australia's Road Safety Strategy 2020, Department of Transport, Planning and Infrastructure, http://www.dpti.sa.gov.au/roadsafety/towards_zero_together
2. South Australia Police Road Safety Strategy 2011-2014, South Australia Police.