



Case Study: W.A Local Council

Perched on the stunning Western Australian coastline, this local city council is home to around 110,000 inhabitants in 23 suburbs across an area measuring almost 170 km².

As well as the usual local government obligations including roads, drainage, cycleways, parklands, foreshores and other infrastructure elements, the Council is responsible for provision of a range community services such as waste removal, healthcare and the administration of development planning and building activities.

THE BUSINESS CASE

The Council already had a drug screening program in place for cause testing which involved sending staff to an off-site clinic for screening. After identifying a desire to improve processes, minimise downtime and lower the associated costs involved, it was decided to investigate the benefits of bringing the entire practice in-house.

Once the capability was embedded into the Council, members of the safety team recognised that a more proactive approach could benefit everyone from a workplace health and safety perspective, so a blanket testing program was established.

The Safety & Injury Management (SIM) Co-ordinator at the Council oversees the development and execution of drug and alcohol testing initiatives. Under the SIM Co-ordinator's supervision, the Council recently finalised implementation of a blanket drug screening program utilising the DrugWipe 5S solution from Pathtech.

"We determined that it was no longer enough to test post-incident only, so we opted for a program of blanket testing. From a safety viewpoint, we felt an obligation to be more proactive," the representative said.

THE SOLUTION

When looking at available alternatives, the Council elected to go with Pathtech, because it was the recognised supplier of roadside drug screening devices to police agencies across Australia.

"It was the only solution we looked at. Given that it was used by the WA police, we thought it would be suitable for our needs," the representative said.

The Council embarked on a schedule of blanket testing, in addition to random and for-cause screening in late 2016. Under the new arrangement, staff were given the option to be tested in-house using the DrugWipe devices, or to attend the off-site clinic for urine screening.



“We recently tested 100 people and not one opted for off-site urine testing.”

“Attending the clinic for testing can take hours, so it’s preferable for most people to undergo the process in-house. It’s also less intrusive for the individual being tested, so we aren’t surprised that the saliva test is preferred.”

“We also consulted the appropriate union body prior to embarking on this process. Union representatives were satisfied with the saliva testing option, so we moved forward with confidence knowing we had their buy-in, which was very important to us,” said the Council’s representative.

KEY OUTCOMES

In order to administer the process in-house, members of both the human resources and health and safety teams undertook comprehensive training on the proper use of the devices, as provided by Pathtech.

“We completed training in September 2016 and by December we had successfully concluded our first series of blanket screens.”

“We are still in the early stages of the process, so it’s difficult to identify any clear-cut measurable outcomes just yet. In terms of acceptance however, we are really pleased.”

“The mere act of implementing this policy signals that we are focusing on the safety of our staff and that determining fitness for work has become a priority for us. Obviously, it is preferable to uncover any potential issues before they lead to accidents or injury and this process enables us to do just that.”

“For the most part, our people understand that objective and are therefore willing to participate. Of course, we can’t definitively say it has changed any one person’s behaviour, but we have to assume that the prospect of random testing is a deterrent to undertaking activities that might jeopardise the safety of any individual,” the SIM Co-ordinator said.

The program has already been deemed a success and it is likely to become a long-term component of the Council’s ongoing health and safety initiatives.

“We have been very happy with the implementation process — it was actually far smoother than we had anticipated. We initially thought that this would be a twelve-month trial and we would make a decision on any further initiatives once we’d determined the results. At this stage, I really can’t see any reason why we wouldn’t continue beyond that period,” the representative said.