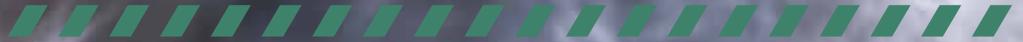


# A WARNING ON DRUG TESTING FOR OPERATORS



An operator was anguished after discovering that several employees deliberately set out to deceive him by trying to stymie a drug test. The employees had purchased ‘synthetic urine’ off the internet, and from a local retailer.

The operator had conducted random drug testing since 2012, and in this particular location, had had only one 'non-negative' result in that time.

But last year, a laboratory found numerous instances of synthetic urine from the one testing session.

"We have a number of staff who're NZQA-qualified to undertake drug testing," says the operator. "One of them tested a single sample which turned out negative for the presence of a drug, but the tester questioned the temperature of that sample, as it was cooler than expected.

"So he took a second sample from the same employee, which was also clear. But still questioning the temperature of that first sample, he sent it off to a laboratory. The lab finding was that the first sample was, in fact, synthetic material.

"So we hit everyone at that location with a test, and sent all the samples to the lab where more synthetic urine was identified.

"The team leader who carried out the original testing was devastated. There was a real sense of betrayal. It was worse than if we'd been made aware of non-negative findings. This was so calculated."

The fallout of an accident involving an employee with the presence of a drug in their system is not lost on the operator.

"There'd be the trauma, shock and guilt triggered by an accident. Then the reputational damage to our company, and to the industry in general, would be enormous.

"The staff members involved would find themselves in a terrible legal disciplinary situation of their own making, and unsupported by us."

The operator says he's been told a lab test will always pick up if a urine sample is synthetic.

"The employees had been told the sample would pass muster. It was all 'chemically balanced' to perfectly mimic natural urine. But it was a lie. They were naïve and it caught them out."

The operator says it's unnervingly easy to purchase the synthetic material.

"I went online and searched 'synthetic urine for sale NZ' and it was disturbing how much was for sale. One of our staff even bought it from a retailer just down the road.

"You can even buy artificial genitalia so if a staff member has to produce the sample in the presence of the tester – which our employees do not have to do – the employee can carry the deception even further."

## // A lab test will always pick up if a urine sample is synthetic. //

The operator's message to other operators?

"If there's any level of suspicion whatsoever, make sure the urine sample goes to the lab, even if you're using external drug testers. Tell those external drug testers you want the sample to go to a lab.

"When this all came about, we engaged a professional drug detection company, and they admitted even their tests cannot identify synthetic urine.

"So any doubts at all, insist on it being sent to the lab."

After the three samples were found to be synthetic material, the operator held an all-staff meeting.

"We tabled what had happened, we told them what we would be doing in the future about drug testing, and that there'd be zero tolerance for such deception.

"For a while after this incident, we sent every test off to the lab, but it all comes at a cost, so we now send a random selection, at random times.

"Tell your staff what you're doing; what your drug testing regime will be, and how lab tests will always pick up synthetic material.

"Hopefully that will stop you experiencing the same distress as us.

"It made us feel so naïve that this was happening under our noses, and we were unaware of it."

CAA Flight Operations Inspector Mac McCarthy commends the operator on how they responded to the incident.

"Every operator needs to know that something like this could happen to them. So it's also to the credit of this operator that they reported it to the CAA, and kept us in the loop.

"That meant we could share it with the wider aviation community." ➔