

Sharp jump in positive drug tests for Diggers

FAILED drug tests among our soldiers, sailors and airmen in the Australian Defence Force have doubled in the past three years.

PETER MICKELBUROUGH Herald Sun JANUARY 11, 2014 6:40AM

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More than 1000 military personnel have tested positive for drugs or refused a test in the past eight years - 68 in the past four months of test results alone.

Alarming, positive tests for hard drugs are growing fastest, with 52 detections of drugs other than cannabis and steroids in four months of testing to October 31 last year, compared with 30 for the whole of the 2010-11 period.

And the number of personnel found with two or more drugs in their system is also on the rise, jumping from fewer than one in 10 positive tests in 2010-11 to almost one in three.

An Australian Defence Force spokeswoman, Lauren Harris, explained that increased random testing, improved test accuracy for a greater range of substances and increased awareness of the signs and symptoms of substance abuse were all contributing factors.

Ms Harris played down the latest spike in detections, saying results for the four months to October 31 were yet to be independently verified so they could not be relied on for any definitive assessment of trends.

Defence made no such qualification when it released the data in response to a *Herald Sun* request.

"Until this verification process is complete, any conclusion that there is an increase in prohibited substance use is speculative," Ms Harris said.

The data shows illicit drug detections in the military rose from 76 positive tests in 2010-11 to 144 in 2012-13. In the four months to October 31 there were 68 positive tests that detected 97 substances.

Over the same period the rate of positive tests has risen fourfold, from 3.8 per 1000 to 15.4 per 1000.

Ms Harris said personnel were subjected to random and targeted testing without warning, and could be tested as part of investigations of service offences under the Defence Force Discipline Act.

"Defence also conducts targeted testing against selected defence work areas or against particular ADF individuals where there is suspicion of the use of prohibited substances, or if trends are identified," Ms Harris said.

The armed forces have conducted more than 115,000 drug tests since mid-2005, of which there were 992 positive results and 14 refusals.

The failed tests resulted in 490 soldiers, 237 sailors and 46 air force personnel being sacked. Another 219 were reduced in rank, given a formal warning or censure or were awaiting a decision.

In the 40 months to October 31, for which detailed test results are available, the most commonly abused drugs in the military were cannabis, or its synthetic equivalent, of which there were 176 detections; amphetamines and methamphetamines - 148 detections; steroids, 86; MDMA and DMA, 38; benzodiazepines, 24; and cocaine, 23.

Positive results for cannabis and synthetic cannabis have dropped from more than half of all failed tests in 2010-11 to less than a third in the most recent positive tests.

While the vast majority of our 56,000 navy, army and air force personnel are clean-living, law-abiding citizens, drug use has become an increasing concern for authorities.

In 2011 it was revealed that up to 21 sailors were allegedly running a drug ring from the Garden Island navy base in Sydney and that about 30 more were possibly involved in distributing the contraband.

A year earlier, seven ADF staff were sent home from Afghanistan and drummed out of the army for steroid abuse.

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