

Drug tests used to jettison staff

Employers are increasingly using drug testing to get rid of staff without having to make redundancy payouts, a drugs and human rights charity has said. Release has reported a four-fold increase in calls to its drugs team about problems with workplace testing in the first three months of 2009 compared with the same period last year. In the first quarter of 2008, the team received 493 calls, with just 31 (6.2 per cent) related to testing at work. In the first three months of this year, 548 calls were received with 145 (26.4 per cent) about this issue. Sacking employees who test positive for illicit drugs allows employers to avoid making redundancy payouts. Cannabis, which can remain detectable for several weeks after use, is the substance causing the biggest problems for employees. While drug testing in the workplace has been routine for many years in some safety critical jobs, such as driving and machine operation, Release reports that many calls are coming from sectors it had comparatively few dealings with before such as office work, banking and commerce. Previously the charity received regular calls from employers about how best to support staff with drug problems. These calls have dwindled to almost zero. Concateno, a group of companies that between them have approximately 60 per cent of the UK workplace drug testing market, reported a 13.2 per cent increase in testing between 2007 and 2008. In 2007, 159,000 workplace drug tests were carried out and in 2008, 180,000 tests were done. Concateno workplace field sales manager Neil James last month said the firm had seen "a steady increase" in demand for drugs testing from the construction industry over the past six months. He said the construction sector now made up about 20 per cent of the workload for Britain's largest drug and alcohol-testing business.

- [The Guardian](#). [Release](#).