

Growth in workplace alcohol and drug testing

By Nicola Cooke

An increasing number of companies are introducing random alcohol and drug testing policies for their employees.

Claymore Laboratories and Lablink, two labs who process random drug tests and pre-employment medicals, have reported an increase

in urine samples being sent to them. They test primarily for alcohol, opiates, cocaine, amphetamines (speed) and cannabis.

According to Lablink, the demand for "point of care" test kits - which allow tests to be carried out in the workplace or in the surgery of a company GP - is increasing and the company will issue 20,000 kits this year.

About one in 20 medicals or drug

tests return positive for a substance. This then has to be confirmed in the laboratory.

Lablink's director of corporate services Conor Hoey said: "While we are seeing interest and awareness improving throughout all industrial sectors, the main activity is with logistic companies, heavy industry and other sensitive areas, as well as with multinational companies which have a global corporate

policy in this area."

Claymore Laboratories has processed an extra 2,500 drug tests in the last year.

The company's spokesman Mark McKeever said he believed the number of tests being carried out on employees would increase with new health and safety legislation due next year.

The regulations will force some business sectors to carry out pre-

employment medicals and random drug tests.

A spokesman for the Health & Safety Authority said it had consulted employers and employees, and the drafting of the legislation was still in its early stages.

Occuhealth, a company recently set up in Dublin to provide occupational health consultancy and training, has received a large number of queries from human resource de-

partments about implementing such policies.

According to Occuhealth's chief executive, Olive Sheehan, the concept of alcohol and drug testing for employees is becoming more popular in Ireland.

There are about 30 occupational health companies in Ireland and the industry is growing.

"In my previous role as a senior health advisor for a laboratory in

2005, I might see five people in six months for drug testing," said Sheehan.

"In my new company, we are seeing two people a week who have been sent in by companies for testing as a condition of their employment."

Two financial services companies in the IFSC in Dublin recently wrote drug testing clauses into their employee contracts.