

# 5. Drug and alcohol testing

The requirement for accredited railway operators to conduct drug and alcohol testing of employees involved in railway safety work was introduced in the *Rail Safety Act 2002* and further developed under the *Rail Safety (Drug and Alcohol Testing) Regulation 2003*.

The *Rail Safety Act 2002* requires all accredited operators to have formal drug and alcohol programs in place that comply with program Guidelines.<sup>21</sup> Since 2006 it has been mandatory for each accredited operator's random testing program to test 25% or more of its employees every year. Testing may also include targeted and post-incident testing.

All operators are required to notify ITSRR of positive test results as well as any instance where an employee

refused to undergo testing. Commercial railway operators are also required to submit quarterly summaries of testing activity to ITSRR. These extra requirements do not apply to tourist and heritage operators.

### Program activity

About 95% of expected quarterly summaries for 2007-08 had been submitted to ITSRR by 30 June 2008. This is comparable with 2006-07 and up from 75% in 2005-06.

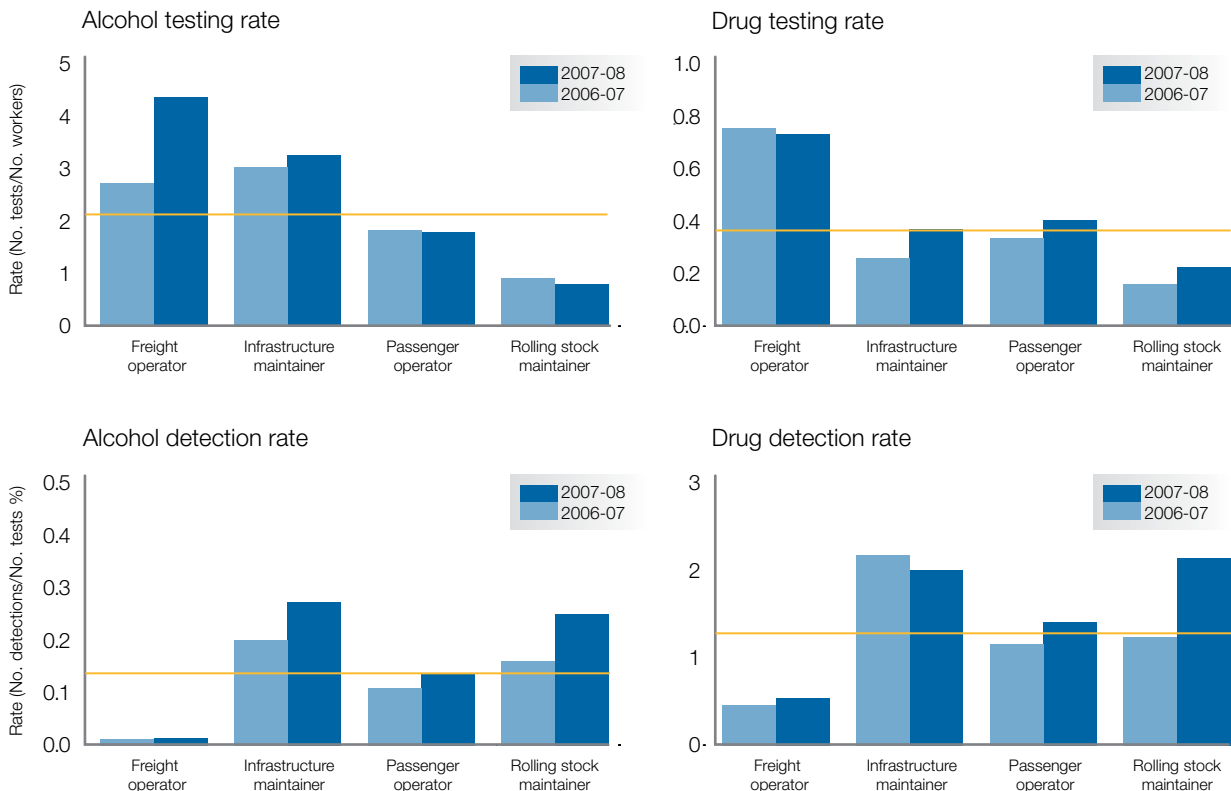
Quarterly activity statements show that over 54,000 alcohol and 10,500 drug tests of rail safety workers were conducted during 2007-08. The number of alcohol tests in 2007-08 is about 15% greater than the final count for 2006-07. The number of

drug tests also increased by about 20% compared to the final count for 2006-07.

A breakdown of random testing activity by industry sector (Figure 31) shows that the testing levels for each sector, as a whole, exceeded the minimum required under the guidelines (a minimum of 25% of the operator's employees per year). A consistent pattern of activity over the last two years was also apparent for most sectors. Freight operators had the highest rate of drug and alcohol testing in 2007-08, averaging 4.4 alcohol and 0.7 drug tests per worker across the sector. However, the performance of this sector was influenced by one large operator representing most employees for that sector.

**Figure 31: Random drug and alcohol testing activity by industry sector**

Yellow line is industry average for 2006-07 and 2007-08. Excludes refusals to be tested (n=18). Excludes the Tourist and Heritage sector which has different testing and reporting requirements.



21 ITSRR. 2006. *Guidelines Relating to Drug and Alcohol Programs*.

As well as self-testing by accredited organisations, ITSRR also undertook drug and alcohol testing of rail safety workers on five separate occasions in 2007-08. This resulted in 109 random alcohol and 26 random drug tests.

The testing undertaken focused on areas not covered by commercial operators' testing programs and operators not previously the subject of testing by ITSRR.

### Program results

Table 7 presents summary statistics for 2007-08 based on all forms of testing.

The overall detection rate – the percentage of total tests that yielded a positive result – was higher for drugs (1.6%) than for alcohol (0.2%). The overall detection rate for drugs and

alcohol in 2007-08 was slightly higher than the corresponding figures for 2006-07 (1.4% and 0.1% respectively) but lower than that for 2005-06 (2.6% and 0.4% respectively). As in previous years, cannabis was the most common drug associated with positive drug tests.

The overall detection rate is not necessarily representative of the general railway safety worker population because it includes results of non-random testing. Non-random testing yields relatively high rates of detection because it includes for-cause testing – testing conducted on the basis that there is reason to believe an individual could be affected by drugs or alcohol.

The overall detection rate is also sensitive to the influence of larger

operators (who conduct the majority of tests) and any organisation reporting anomalous results. For this reason, Table 7 also includes a summary of detection rates on an operator basis. It shows that 68% of operators testing for alcohol and almost 37% of operators testing for drugs did not return a positive result in 2007-08.

A breakdown of random test results by industry sector is shown in Figure 31. The freight sector as a whole had a relatively low rate of detection for drugs and alcohol compared to other sectors. Higher rates of detection were suggested for the infrastructure maintainer sector as a whole over both years.

**Table 7: Drug and alcohol testing results – July 2007 to June 2008**

Statistics based on information in quarterly returns (for data on testing activity) and individual notifications (for data on positive results) received as at 31 August 2008. Excludes refusal to be tested (n=22). Includes all testing reasons, e.g. for cause, random, post incident.

Description	Alcohol	Drug
Number of accredited operators testing	38	35
Approximate random component	98%	90%
Overall detection rate <sup>1</sup>	0.2%	1.6%
Median accredited operator detection rate <sup>2</sup>	0.0%	0.9%
Number of accredited operators reporting no positive results	26	13
Number of accredited operators reporting exactly one positive result	5	7
Number of accredited operators reporting more than one positive result	7	15

1. Total positive tests (all accredited operators) divided by total tests (all accredited operators) multiplied by 100.

2. *Accredited operator detection rate* is accredited operators' total positive tests divided by accredited operators' total tests multiplied by 100. Median is the middle ranked value of all accredited operator detection rates.