

HEALTH & SAFETY

A JOURNAL OF RECORD ON HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AS THEY AFFECT THE WORKPL.

REVIEW

Drug testing on unions' agenda

Several union conferences in recent weeks have discussed the issue of drug testing, for which the HSA has now decided to issue guidelines rather than legislation.

The TEEU biennial conference in Cork discussed a motion calling for any drug testing in Ireland to be based on the European Workplace Drug Testing Society (EWDTS) Guidelines for Legally Defensible Drug Testing.

The motion said this was to ensure that specimen collection, laboratory organisation, laboratory analysis procedures, quality assurance/quality control and interpretation of results was "robust and uniform". This would "ensure that the 'zero tolerance policy' adopted by many companies operating in Ireland does not conflict with the proposed national policy".

Delegates to the SIPTU Midlands and South East biennial delegate conference were told by Maurice Quinlan, director of the EAP Institute that employers should update their safety statements to include the firm's policy on intoxicants in the workplace.

Employers should, **Quinlan** said, introduce drug and alcohol policies and have procedures in place to deal with issues. Employers are, he said, required to advise employees of their obligations under the Act. Among the preventative measures employers should take are, he added, the training of managers and supervisors and the identification of local services for the treatment and rehabilitation of employees who may have developed drug and alcohol problems.

Reviewing case law, **Quinlan** said that the Labour Court has ruled that alcoholism is a disability under the Employment Equality Act 1998-2004. As a result of the decision in the case of A Government Department and An Employee, alcoholics cannot be treated less favourably than others at work.