Random drug tests hit harder

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Questions: Police interview a man after a road-side drug test. Picture: Ben Crabtree/The West Austrlian

Police can now test drivers across WA for illicit drugs in less than five minutes with state-of-the-art machines being rolled out in city and regional areas.

The West Australian was invited to see the expanded drug- driving enforcement in action and found one in 10 people tested was positive to illicit drugs.

Between three booze bus locations last Thursday night, 59 road users were given random or targeted drug tests and six of the tests were positive.

The average of positive tests for illicit drugs on drivers in 2012 and last year was one in 14, including for methylamphetamine and THC (cannabis).

Using Road Trauma Trust Account funds, police have bought 20 Draeger Drug Test 5000 machines to replace five Cozart Drug Detection System testers introduced in 2007.

In addition to the new systems, thousands of updated mouth swab kits have replaced the older Securetec Drugwipes, which cuts preliminary roadside tests from 6-8 minutes to 3-5 minutes.

Before now, drug-driving testing was rare in regional WA and limited only to visits from city-based booze and drug buses.

Seven of the new machines will be based in regional hubs, with another three to be used when needed.

Police Minister Liza Harvey said she hoped this new testing regime coupled with the new machines would help put to rest myths that drug-affected drivers could get away with their illegal and irresponsible behaviour.

"I find it alarming that they are first of all breaking the law by taking the drugs, but then they are also choosing to drive and put themselves and everybody else on the road at risk," Mrs Harvey said.

"You'll get tested, you'll get caught and police will at that point charge you with the absolute maximum that they can."

During the same Thursday night operation, 873 random breath tests netted six people for drink-driving, including two who blew more than three times the legal limit.

Officers on one of the buses spoke of the alarming number of drivers testing positive to illicit drugs.

They said a 38-year-old mother driving her six-year-old child and eight-week-old baby tested positive to methylamphetamine at 2pm early last week.

Mrs Harvey described that mother's actions as "horrifying and appalling".

"When people are using drugs, drugs are their main priority and everything else is of a much, much lower priority," she said.

"Those two children could have lost their lives in that journey and that family are so lucky she was caught and as a result those children are safe."