

Drugs in Wastewater – how science is being used to drive community responses



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“One day, a few years back, someone came up with the kooky idea to regularly test the wastewater in New Zealand for illicit drugs. That person deserves a medal.”

“Whoever it was that convinced the Government that doing wastewater drug testing was a good idea, gained the funding to achieve something that is long-term and not directly related to enforcement or rehabilitation, and gained the goodwill of local councils that collect it has done the country a huge favour.”

“We now have an accurate picture of drug use in New Zealand - where and what drugs are being consumed, We can also track consumption trends over time. **This is not just a curiosity, this science from the sewers has a range of important policy implications.**”

- ***Dr Jarrod Gilbert was the director of criminal justice at the University of Canterbury.***



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Aotearoa NZ DIWW programme

Most comprehensive in the world

- 62 regular sites
- 50 councils involved
- Monthly sampling at most sites
- 75% - 80% population coverage
- Meth, cocaine, MDMA, heroin, fentanyl + NPS

Australia

56% population coverage
Bimonthly sampling
Started 2016

Finland

>60% population coverage
Twice, every second year
Started 2012

England and Scotland

30% population coverage
Bimonthly sampling
Started 2023

Others include:

Spain
South Korea
China
Turkey



Why test wastewater?

- Non-invasive
- Non-identifiable
- Non-biased
- Cheap
- Significant population coverage
- Understanding the behaviour of communities



Complementary to other drug Intelligence techniques

What does the data show us?

