

FSG introduces drug-analysis device

Non-trafficable quantities of suspected illicit substances can now be presumptively tested in the field, which allows immediate identification.

STORY **SIOBHAN MCMAHON**
POLICE MEDIA UNIT

PHOTOS **REUBEN ENNOR**
PUBLIC AFFAIRS BRANCH

Forensic Science Group (FSG) crime scene investigators have started using Raman technology that analyses suspected drug samples quickly and easily in the field.

The Raman device uses a low-power laser to scan a drug sample. It then compares this with an on-board library of 83 illicit drugs, 41 precursors and 68 cutting agents.

Within seconds, the composition of the sample is displayed on a screen.

The machine is capable of analysing solid or powder samples, and can even scan through relatively transparent bottles and plastic bags.

FSG received nine devices in December last year and a number of crime scene officers have completed the training to date.

Two FSG police officers who have been authorised as analysts have commenced presumptive testing in the metro area and are based at the NSW Forensic & Analytical Science Service (FASS). This allows

FASS scientists to focus on matters involving trafficable amounts of drugs.

A country pilot of the device started in Newcastle late last month, with plans to roll the service out over the next few months to other major FSG hubs including Albury, Lismore, Wollongong and Sydney.

Deputy Commissioner Catherine Burn said if the sample is a non-trafficable quantity, in-field testing is all we need for evidentiary purposes.

"The device allows us to immediately determine whether a substance is an illicit drug and if so, which drug we're dealing with, what charges might apply and what safety considerations we need to be aware of for

the officers involved," she said.

FSG Commander, Assistant Commissioner Peter Cotter said the technology is making a significant impact on a backlog of drug exhibits awaiting forensic analysis at the facility. In September 2013, the backlog was estimated at 2500, the equivalent of six months' work.

"This is now down to about 1400, and we anticipate that by early July this year, the turnaround time for forensic analysis of drug exhibits will be a very reasonable 28 days," Assistant Commissioner Cotter said.



ABOVE Assistant Commissioner Peter Cotter (*left*) and Deputy Commissioner Catherine Burn APM (*right*) inspect the Raman device in action

