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DrugWipe: Victor Ortino markets product that secretly tests kids for drugs

By RYAN MILLS

NAPLES — A lethargic teenager whose grades have dropped suddenly. An employee who's been acting strangely and missing work.

Any concerned parent or employer may suspect drugs are to blame. But how can they know for sure, and at the same time avoid an awkward confrontation?

Enter local private investigator Victor Ortino, a former candidate for Collier sheriff, who for the past year has been marketing a tool that he says allows parents and employers to secretly test their child or employee for drugs.

The tool is called DrugWipe, a handheld drug-detection device about the size of a candy bar that tests for drug residue in saliva and sweat. In addition to directly testing a person, DrugWipe can be used on surfaces and items that have been touched recently by the suspected user.

In theory, a parent could test their child's cell phone, keyboard, toothbrush or light switch, while their child is out of the house.

"That's the beauty of it. The child doesn't have to be there," said David Rich, a private investigator who works with Ortino. "They would never know."

But the device is not without its critics.

In addition to raising questions about ethics and privacy, some experts say parents risk breaking vitally important bonds of trust with their children by using a clandestine approach to drug testing.

"I think when you have to run into your child's room and sneak around to see if they're doing drugs or not, I think the approach is wrong," said Maria Delgado, executive director of Drug Free Collier, who does not endorse products. "If you have a suspicion, then you need to confront that child or that person in a delicate way."

If the test comes back negative, the child will never know, Rich said. If it comes back positive, identifying the drug problem early and seeking help before law enforcement or school officials get involved, outweighs the negatives, he said.

"Once a child has a record, it's going to affect their entire academic career," Rich said.

Used in some European countries to test for drugged drivers, DrugWipe tests for cannabis, cocaine, opiates, amphetamines, methamphetamines, Ecstasy, and benzodiazepines. The results are reported in a window on the device in about 10 minutes — similar to an over-the-counter pregnancy test.

“When you take a drug, you sweat out the raw antibodies of that drug,” Ortino said. “This is designed to pick up microscopic traces of the drug in one of the drug families.”

More than 40 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies use DrugWipe, according to a promotional flyer; None so far in Florida.

After months of research, Ortino said he decided the device was not only something he could use as an investigator, but something he could market across Florida. He is in the process of developing a network of certified technicians and dealers around the state.

“We are trying to become the main distributor for Florida,” Ortino said.

In addition to being used by concerned parents and employers, Ortino said DrugWipe can be used in child custody cases, as a pre-employment screening tool, and by home inspectors looking for evidence of a meth lab. Depending on the drug, the test can be conducted up to a week after the drug was taken, Ortino said.

For \$150, Ortino will sell parents two of the devices and train them how to use them. Additional DrugWipes are \$50 each.

Parents must sign a waiver saying they will only test their own children on their own property and that they will seek professional counseling upon discovery of a positive test.

Dina Schleifer, a private investigator with Island Eyes Investigative Services, says she’s been using DrugWipe to conduct pre-employment screenings. She intends to expand the use of the devices in her business.

“I’m still new at it, but I think that this is a great item, a great tool,” Schleifer said. “It’s very convenient for these people to just come into our office, or for us to go to them, depending on what the client wants.

“It’s easy, it’s accurate, and nobody’s really intimidated by it. And you get your results right away.”

Delgado asks parents to be careful. Sneaking around to see if your child is being sneaky, Delgado said, may add insult to injury.

“Honesty,” she said, “is paramount in a relationship between parents and a child.”

For more information on DrugWipe, visit www.ortinopi.com, or call (239) 353-4224.