

# Drink-spiking evil exposed

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## **HOBART counsellors say they are dealing with two to five sexual assaults a week linked to drink spiking.**

As well as adults, children as young as five have had their drinks spiked by sex predators, the counsellors say.

The activity has been described as the "perfect crime" because it is often unreported, blamed on drinking too much and generally out of the system within six hours, says Sexual Assault Support Services chief executive officer Karen Jones.

Ms Jones says there is no trace of the drug, and often no memory of the criminal act, by the time many victims realise they have fallen foul of a spiked drink.

Many victims are too ashamed to report the crime, she says.

The revelations come amid calls for pubs and clubs to adopt anti-spiking technology that allows patrons to use do-it-yourself drug tests on their drinks.

The technology allows drinkers to tip a small amount of their beverage on to a test spot on a coaster. If it turns blue it shows drugs are present.

Readings cannot be achieved on wine products, beverages containing milk or cream, oily liqueurs, tonic waters or fruit juices.

But the technology's Australian distributor, Drink Safe Technologies, says the coasters, which have been used elsewhere for some time, could save the lives of Tasmanians.

Drink Safe Technologies manager Dean Sunshine said the coasters were used in all states except Tasmania.

The Australian Hotels Association said there was no plan to introduce the devices.

Last year Tasmania passed legislation to criminalise drink spiking. Previously it was an offence only if someone administered drugs or alcohol with the intention of having sexual intercourse. Laws now cover recklessness and practical jokes, and offenders can be jailed for up to two years.

The National Drug Strategy has estimated that between July 2002 and June 2003 there were 3000-4000 suspected drink spikings in Australia, with a third of those involving sexual assault and four out of five victims being female.

Southern District Response Division Acting Inspector Gavin Hallett said people should not be complacent about drink spiking, especially with the Christmas festive season looming.

"If a person believes they may be the victim of drink spiking they should ask someone they trust to get them to a safe place and report the matter to police as soon as practicable," Insp Hallett said.

AHA Tasmania general manager Steve Old said the publican should also be told as soon as possible.