

in brief

Lines of inquiry

Police are to use new cocaine-testing kits to charge people suspected of possessing the drug within minutes rather than days. Thames Valley Police are training scenes-of-crime and drugs operations officers on how to use the £5 kits. Currently suspects are bailed while the cocaine is sent to a laboratory for testing.

Opium and out

A senior Afghan minister has resigned because he says President Hamid Karzai's government has failed to purge officials who are involved in the drugs trade. Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali quit after openly complaining that senior government officials were complicit with warlords and the trade in illegal opium.

C for cannabis?

Drug experts will advise ministers against reversing last January's move to downgrade cannabis from a class B to a class C drug, claims a newspaper. According to the *Independent on Sunday*, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs will rule out a u-turn after hearing evidence from cannabis users, police and drugs charities despite claims it is linked with severe mental illness.

Cracks in the capital

One in every 100 Londoners could be crack cocaine users, say researchers. A study by Imperial College London estimated there are 46,000 crack users aged 15-44 in the capital. Evidence came from people in specialist drug treatment, arrests and hospital surveys.

Lethal stripper

An industrial solvent used to clean graffiti has killed two clubbers this year. Dr Sean Cummings of the Freedom Health private gay clinic in London said although only a small number of clubbers are using it, he is aware of two who have been killed. Gamma butyrolactone (GBL), has the same effects as date rape drug GHB.

Crack squirrels: the making of a bushy tale

It was the drug tale that had legs – and it ran and ran. The eye-popping revelation last month that squirrels in Brixton, south London were hooked on crack cocaine was reported all over the national media.

'SQUIRRELS JOIN THE DRUG WAR', screamed the *Daily Mail*, while rival *Daily Express* devoted 400 words under the headline 'SQUIRRELS GO NUTS FOR CRACK COCAINE'. Tourists photographed each other standing next to billboards advertising the story. But where did it come from?

Druglink can reveal that the source of the story was a tongue in cheek comment on an internet chat forum. In a post on the Brixton-based web community, urban75 – which made headlines in 2002 when the then Commander of Brixton Police Brian Paddick wrote on the forum that he found the "concept of anarchism" appealing – 'Bob' asked 'Can squirrels get addicted to crack?'

Bob explained that one of his neighbours had told him crack dealers were hiding stashes of the drug in his front garden. "An hour earlier I'd seen a squirrel wandering round the garden, digging in the flowerbeds... do I face the prospect of dreaded crack squirrels? I'm worried by being done over by a twitchy squirrel."

The thread was spotted by Greg Truscott,



chief reporter of local newspaper the *South London Press*. "It was an interesting story and I'm happy to admit it's an exaggeration of the truth," he said. "I doubted there were drug-addicted squirrels out there, but our paper had murders on pages one to five – so I thought if we have some fun and make people laugh then why not." Four days later the story appeared on the paper's front page and the next day was in every national newspaper, Radio 4 and the Jonathan Ross Show.

'Bob' told *Druglink*: "My squirrels are still happily scampering round the garden unaware of their celebrity status. And the local cats are still chasing the crack squirrels, without any fear. I've had a happy few weeks of seeing my jokey speculation become a major national story. It seems that furry animals and drugs are an irresistible combination."

Addaction chief calls time after 15 years

PETER Martin has stepped down as Chief Executive of national drugs and alcohol treatment charity Addaction.

Martin told staff it was one of the toughest decisions he has had to make in the 15 years in his role as CEO. In that time Addaction has grown from a small charity to the £22 million turnover organisation it is today, with 70 services seeing 23,000 people each year.

"What I have learned in my working life, which began in the drugs field with Phoenix House over two decades ago, is that there is no growth without pain," he said. "I feel that is

true for me personally and for the organisation. Addaction will, I'm sure, sustain the passion combined with professionalism that has given it the edge in delivery in recent years.

"From my new perspective on the sidelines I will encourage a more united front among providers, who all make a difference separately, but together can really help each other and government to move the drugs agenda forward towards greater effectiveness."

Ian Robinson, CEO of EATA said: "No individual has contributed more to the



Martin: huge legacy

development of drug treatment services than Peter Martin. Even as a successful and entrepreneurial high profile CEO, at heart, Peter has remained a drugs worker, never happier than when with clients. His legacy is huge."

Addaction's Acting Chief Executive is William Butler, former Chief Operating Office of the charity.