Fit to Work and Impairment

Cannabis at Work

Impairment (also known as unfit for duty/work) due to cannabis use can have severe consequences at any worksite, not only for the impaired worker, but also their co-workers, supervisor, and employer.

Cannabis is a broad term used to describe various products (dried leaves, oils, hash, concentrates, etc.) that are made from resins, leaves, and flowers from cannabis plants.

Cannabis is used for medical, recreational and industrial purposes. It can enter the body in many ways, such as:

- inhalation of smoke (on its own or mixed with tobacco) or vapour;
- ingestion (pill or mixed with other edible products); and
- absorption through the skin (patches, creams, or salves).

What should employers know?

Employers should address a variety of impairments at the worksite and not just focus on cannabis. Reducing the impact of cannabis impairment is the same as reducing other types of impairment (fatigue, stress, illness, alcohol, illicit drugs, prescribed medication, and over-the-counter medication).

An impairment policy that covers multiple sources of impairment must include cannabis and require all employees, visitors, and contractors to arrive fit for work.

Policies and testing

Employers have always been responsible for ensuring their workers are able to perform work safely. This has not changed with the legalization of recreational cannabis.

The impairment policy must include:

- clear expectations on workers' responsibility to complete tasks unimpaired;
- training for supervisors and workers on their responsibilities to recognize and respond to an impaired worker.

Individual worksites may opt for specific worker requirements within their policy, such as how, when, where or why recreational cannabis can be present at the worksite.

A sample impairment policy is available with the impairment safety sheet.

Employers should seek legal advice before implementing substance testing in the workplace.

Northwest Territories and Nunavut Safety Legislation

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, Section 35.1, Impairment

Mine Health and Safety Regulations, Section 18.1.01 (NT), Impairment, and Section 18.02.1 (NU), Impairment