Fit to Work and Impairment

Medications and Illness

Impairment (also known as unfit for work/duty) can come from many sources, including medication (whether prescribed or purchased over the counter) and illness; and can have severe consequences for the individual, their co-workers, supervisor, and employer.

Impairment

Individuals do not often consider prescription or over-the-counter medication as something that could affect their ability to perform their work safely. Medication and the effects of illness can greatly impact whether or not an individual is fit to work that day. Employees must know to self-identify impairment and how to report their concerns according to the employer's impairment policy.

Impairment policy

While the employer does not need to know the specifics of an employee's medication or illness, they do need to know if it could impact their ability to work safely. An impairment policy which includes illness or medication allows the employer to accommodate workers and prevent impairment at the worksite.

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

Employers can reduce the impact of impairment in their workplace by having policies and procedures and training their supervisors and workers accordingly.

Employers can manage risk of impairment by:

- conducting a hazard and risk assessment for impairment in the workplace;
- training supervisors and workers on how to recognize and report impairment;
- training supervisors and workers on their roles and responsibilities within the policy;
- applying the policy consistently and reviewing it regularly;
- preparing for impairment and accommodation.

Employers should maintain open and non-judgemental communication with employees about medication and illness to make the process of reporting and accommodating impairment more transparent.

The employer can provide a functional abilities form that outlines an employee's essential duties to the employee's medical practitioner. The practitioner can identify which tasks the employee can perform safely and provide guidance on how to effectively accommodate the employee.

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