



TOOLBOX TALK

Impairment in the Workplace

Quick facts

Impairment in the workplace:

- Applies to more than just alcohol or cannabis use.
- May also include use of legal or illegal substances or medications, fatigue or medical conditions.
- Has many effects on the body and may:
 - Hinder a person's ability to concentrate and make decisions.
 - Affect their motor skills, such as lack of co-ordination and slower reaction time, and including the ability to drive a motor vehicle or operate heavy equipment.
 - Impact job performance and productivity.

Recognize the signs

Observe

An employer may observe changes in an employee's attendance, performance or behaviour, such as:

- Personality changes or erratic behaviour (e.g. increased interpersonal conflicts; overreaction to criticism).
- Appearance of impairment at work (e.g. odour of alcohol or drugs, glassy or red eyes, unsteady gait, slurring, poor co-ordination).
- Working in an unsafe manner or involvement in an incident.
- Failing a drug or alcohol test.
- Consistent lateness, absenteeism, or reduced productivity or quality of work.

Don't assume

There could be many other reasons that explain these situations, such as:

- Another disability or temporary medical condition.
- Conflict at work.
- Job dissatisfaction or low morale.
- Stress of balancing work and caregiving obligations.
- Personal problems unrelated to work.

Sometimes, immediate action is required

An employee may need to be removed immediately from the workplace if:

- They are involved in a workplace incident, or near incident, where impairment is suspected.
- Their behaviour or performance is having a serious impact on the workplace, owing to suspected impairment.
- Their behaviour puts their own safety or the safety of others at risk.

Health & safety

Providing a safe work environment

As per Occupational Health and Safety legislation across Canada, employers have a duty to provide a safe work environment and take all reasonable precautions to protect the health and safety of employees and others in the workplace.

- Work with health and safety committees to create and implement a plan that identifies workplace hazards.
- Ensure that the plan includes the impacts of possible impairment.
- Carry out the appropriate corrective action to prevent incidents or injuries.

Source: CCOHS's white paper *Workplace Strategies: Risk of Impairment from Cannabis*

Human rights

Duty to accommodate

If an employee has a diagnosed medical condition or disability, employers have the duty to accommodate that individual.

- An employee with a diagnosed medical condition may be taking medications (including cannabis for therapeutic reasons) that may cause impairment or result in diminished functionality. If this is the case, the employer has a duty to accommodate and reassign the employee to other work as appropriate.
- Employees who suffer from a dependence on drugs or alcohol — classified as a disability under the Canadian Human Rights Act — should be accommodated to do their job (or assigned other work as appropriate) while they are seeking treatment for their dependence or being prescribed medicinal cannabis as part of a treatment plan.

Source: CCOHS's white paper *Workplace Strategies: Risk of Impairment from Cannabis*

Employer roles & responsibilities

- Become familiar with Occupational Health and Safety legislation for your jurisdiction.
- Consult with legal and human resources professionals as required.
- Ensure that your organization has a policy to address impairment, specifically as it applies to safety sensitive duties (often zero tolerance).
- Train your supervisors to recognize possible signs of impairment.
- Ensure supervisors are trained on procedures that may relate to workplace impairment, such as disciplinary or accommodation processes.



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