

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CANNABIS LEGALIZATION AND WORKPLACE SAFETY

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### **Updating health and safety policies to ensure everyone knows what to do about impairment in the workplace**

It's official: cannabis will be legal in Canada on October 17, 2018, and medical cannabis is subject to different rules than recreational cannabis. The Ontario government has posted [what will be legal in Ontario](#).

"Impairment is a longstanding occupational health and safety issue, and the Ministry of Labour makes it really clear: recreational cannabis in the workplace is illegal, and will continue to be after legalization," says John Levesque, Director, Education and Information Services at Workplace Safety North.

"You will only be able to use recreational cannabis in a private residence. It's not allowed in any public place, workplace or motorized vehicle," notes Levesque.

#### **1. Review and update your workplace health and safety policy**

Most workplaces already have policies in place to deal with impairment in the workplace – whether it's alcohol or drugs, prescription or recreational – so now is a good time to review and ensure everyone in the workplace – managers and workers alike – know what to do if they're concerned about their safety or someone else's due to impairment.

Keep in mind, [many incidents occur "the morning after" when blood alcohol levels may still be high](#). When a worker is hungover and the senses are dulled from the ill effects of too much alcohol or drugs in the system – it's prime time for workplace incidents to occur.

Another important part of your policy is worker access to employee assistance and treatment programs. Encouragement and support play a large role in reducing stigma and accessing resources, as we all need support at one time or another.

Update your existing policy, plus use the new and convenient [health and safety checklist](#) developed by the Ministry of Labour, which can be customized according to business size.

#### **2. Communicate policy to everyone in workplace**

Verbally walk through your written policy, ideally in a face-to-face meeting, if not, via phone or video. Communicate very clearly what is expected of workers, and what they can expect from management.

Emphasize the importance of looking out for their own safety and that of others.

Clearly outline the steps to take when impairment is suspected.

Use real-life examples, such as a supervisor driving a worker home to 'sleep it off' and later encouraging the worker to access counselling and treatment programs; if it concerns a manager or business owner, workers may need to contact the Ministry of Labour.

Employers and supervisors set the tone for how to deal with health and safety issues, so it's important to take a compassionate, non-judgmental approach; with addiction, stigmatization can be a trigger toward additional substance use.

This is also an opportunity to bring in a guest speaker, such as a nurse from the local health unit, to educate, destigmatize addiction, discuss treatment options, and open up a general discussion around self-care and well-being.

### **3. Regularly review and communicate your health and safety policy**

Every time there is new health and safety legislation or information, use it as an opportunity to keep discussion of health and safety front and centre at your workplace.

Due to increasing technology and changing economies, the lines between home and work blur, and focusing on well-being, mental health, and general health and safety helps communicate concern for all workers.

Be a health and safety champion, not only because it's the right thing to do, but because you have the opportunity to help educate everyone on the latest developments and resources available.

#### **Cannabis - Rules for the workplace**

Strict rules are already in place to make sure workplaces are safe

**Consuming recreational cannabis in the workplace is illegal, and will continue to be after legalization.**

#### **Employers (and supervisors):**

- need to know the rules for [medical cannabis](#)
- will be required to address workplace hazards, under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)

#### **Employees and workers:**

- who are unable or unfit to work safely could be a hazard to themselves or to others in the workplace
- have a duty to perform work safely and to report any hazards to their supervisor or employer under the OHSA