

Marijuana and Workplace Safety

Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

Wherever you reside in North America, and whatever the legal stance in your region, one can't deny that, every day, marijuana use is becoming a more socially acceptable practice as the legality of marijuana usage continues to spread.

As such, we must discuss what constitutes appropriate and "safe" recreational or medical marijuana usage. This is especially true if marijuana use is completely illegal in your area. It's likely the laws pertaining to marijuana usage are confusing and don't address all of the safety issues that may arise. You also need to be aware of the repercussions of using marijuana in the wrong place or at the wrong time. If you don't educate yourself about the hazards, you could seriously injure yourself or others and face dire legal consequences.

What's the Danger?

Many people are under the false impression that marijuana is safer than drinking or taking other drugs and they can still get high and perform their normal job functions, process information and even drive a vehicle without impairment.

That's simply not true. Marijuana can throw off your balance, slow your reaction time and impair your coordination – all essential functions of performing many tasks you do everyday. Just like with other drugs and even over the counter medication, the use of marijuana can make you a risk to yourself and others at work and outside of work.

How to Protect Yourself

It's safest to think of marijuana use the same way you think about alcohol and other drug use at work – it shouldn't be done because

being impaired at work is unsafe, illegal and against company policy in most cases. Keep the following tips in mind:

- Never drive or operate work vehicles while impaired by alcohol, marijuana or any other drug. Many other tasks, from operating equipment or power tools, to working in confined spaces, should never be performed by anyone who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
 - Some employers test workers for alcohol and drugs, especially those in safety-sensitive jobs and after a safety incident in which impairment may have been an issue.
 - Marijuana stays in your system for days or even weeks if you're a heavy user, so using marijuana on your own time could easily threaten your job security.
- Educate yourself about your rights, the laws surrounding marijuana in your jurisdiction, your workplace's policy on alcohol and drug use, potential health risks and consequences of using marijuana and other drugs.
 - Several US states and Canadian provinces allow the recreational use of marijuana and the use of medical marijuana for treating a variety of illnesses and conditions.
 - However, most workplaces have a zero-tolerance policy for alcohol or drug impairment on the job. If you're under the influence of marijuana while at work, even for a medical condition, you may be breaching your employer's policies regarding being sober and fit for work.
- Don't forget, with a few exceptions, the selling, growing, and use of marijuana is still illegal and penalties can be harsh.

Final Word

Responsible cannabis consumers come from all walks of life and are often contributing members of society. However, just as with other drugs, it can still cause impairment and this puts you and others at risk for an accident or injury.

