

cannabis in the workplace

Up to a quarter of all occupational injuries and 20% of fatal injuries in the workplace can be linked to alcohol and other drug use. This has prompted many organisations and companies to implement workplace alcohol and other drug education and testing across Australia in a bid to create safer working environments.

According to a 2008 National Centre for Education and Training of Addiction report, based on a 2004 data set, 13.5% of the workforce had used cannabis in the last year. A greater proportion of tradespeople used cannabis than any other occupation. This survey also indicated that 2.5% of the Australian workforce reported going to work under the influence of illicit drugs.

Cannabis affects every user differently and can depend on:

- the person – their mood, personality, size and weight
- the amount taken and whether it is mixed with anything else
- the environment where the drug is used

If cannabis is used in the workplace it can affect the health and safety of the person taking it as well as those around them. It may also have an adverse effect on productivity.

It is also important to remember that cannabis is an illegal drug, which may carry a fine or criminal conviction.

how does cannabis affect work performance?

Cannabis use is known to cause the following:

- short-term memory problems
- impaired thinking
- loss of balance and coordination
- decreased concentration
- changes in sensory perception
- impaired ability to perform complex tasks
- decreased alertness
- decreased reaction time

The effects of cannabis can last from two to six hours. These side effects may make it dangerous to use cannabis at work, particularly if a person is operating heavy machinery or driving a vehicle. There is also a greater risk of an accident occurring due to the poor performance of even simple manual tasks.

Regular cannabis users may start to exhibit signs of loss of energy and interest in their tasks, causing their performance to suffer. They may also find it difficult to learn new work skills.

what about Workers' Compensation?

If a disability is incurred as a result of cannabis use this may not be covered under Workers' Compensation rules.

can cannabis be found in random drug-testing?

While there is much community debate about workplace drug-testing, certain organisations or companies have introduced such initiatives in an attempt to ensure workplace safety and improve worker productivity. Workplace drug-testing can identify if someone has used cannabis.

Once taken, cannabis is stored in the fatty tissues until it is slowly released back into the bloodstream and excreted from the body. Traces of cannabis can be found in urine for one to five days after occasional use and up to six weeks (or more) in people who use cannabis regularly (more than three times a week over a number of years). Cannabis can therefore be easily identified by drug testing procedures for a much longer time period compared to most other drugs.

in summary

For the following performance, legal and occupational health and safety reasons, the use of cannabis is not acceptable in the workplace:

- cannabis is an illegal drug, which may carry a fine or criminal conviction
- work performance may be affected
- the safety of the user and others may be affected
- accidents resulting in disability may not be covered under Workers' Compensation

For more information please see the NCPIC bulletins '[cannabis and other drug use in the Australian workforce: findings from the 2007 NDSHS data](#)' and '[clinical and medico-legal implications of drug testing for cannabis](#)'.