

The real tools in our workplaces: stoned workmates

20 August 2014? Up to one in five blue collar workers may be high at work, according to a recent survey conducted by the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC).

In a sample of more than 500 Aussie tradies responding to a web-based survey, from various fields including mining, construction, transport and defence, 21% of respondents indicated they have consumed cannabis within four hours of going to work, despite more than half identifying their workplace performs regular illicit drug testing.

"With Tradies Health Month being promoted in August, we feel it important to stress that some factors influencing the health and safety of blue collar workers are very much within their own control," said Dr Peter Gates of NCPIC. "Our survey revealed almost 20% of blue collar respondents are actually using cannabis while they are at work, which is not only shocking, but shows the disregard some people have for their own safety and that of their workmates."

As cannabis use has been linked to impaired thinking, loss of balance and coordination, decreased concentration and impaired ability to complete complex tasks, it is not surprising that one in three of all respondents indicated they believe cannabis use has a significant impact on work skills and safety. Among those admitting to having used cannabis before or during work, this figure increased to almost half (49%).

"What's really alarming is some tradies are operating heavy machinery, dealing with hazardous materials and driving oversized vehicles on public roads, while their ability to do so is seriously impaired by an illegal substance ? and they know it. Twelve percent of survey respondents reported they have tested positive for drugs in the workplace, the majority for cannabis, and 63% said they know someone who has failed a drug test."

While the rates of random testing in workplaces have increased, the perception of risk of detection is low with only 29% of respondents in workplaces that do perform testing believing they will definitely be tested. A third said it is unlikely or there is only a small chance.

"Tradies need to realise that being caught by a drug test is not the only risk associated with using cannabis at work. In the short-term they risk losing their job ? or worse, a mate, and in the long-term they are increasing their risk of developing respiratory and mental illnesses. If they are smoking before work, it's also more likely they are having a problem controlling their use, which is a sign of addiction. No tradie wants to be responsible

for hurting a mate while on the job, so knowing the side effects of cannabis use, and weighing up that risk, is really important."

The National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre is a Government-funded initiative aimed at preventing uptake of cannabis and providing evidence-based resources for users and their support networks, as well as specialists in the alcohol and other drug field. In response to this month's survey, the Centre has produced a brief information pack about cannabis and drug testing, available free to organisations that wish to educate their new starters, by including it in induction kits. The pack can be accessed via the Centre's website, www.ncpic.org.au.

Individuals who currently have concerns or problems related to their cannabis use can access the free national Cannabis Information and Helpline on 1800 30 40 50

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