

Fit for Work policies and impairment disclosure

Explain dangers

Performing high-risk work while impaired is very dangerous. To perform their work safely, workers must be fully alert and aware as they carry out tasks.

Impairment can be caused by substances like drugs or alcohol—or by other factors, including fatigue, mental illness, stressful life events, medication, or injury.

As well, stressful working conditions, such as long hours, harassment and bullying, or traumatic workplace incidents, can cause workers to become distracted or less focused on the safe performance of their work tasks.

Identify controls

All workplaces should develop Fit for Work policies that clearly explain how workers should react when they believe their own or another worker's impairment is making them unfit for work. Preventing impairment at work can prevent health and safety risks to workers and the general public.

Workplaces should consider the following when determining their Fit for Work policies:

- Training and education requirements should outline how workplace parties are expected to access and understand the policy.
- Workers must tell their immediate supervisor or follow company-specific protocols if they suspect somebody on their jobsite is working while impaired. There must also be policies in place regarding how workers can disclose their own impairment.
- Workers who disclose that they are unfit for work do not have to explain how they became impaired. The cause of their impairment could be a protected ground under Ontario's human rights and privacy legislation.
- Supervisors have a duty to inquire if they believe a worker might be impaired. Avoid making assumptions or accusing the worker of being impaired.

- Not all workers will be willing or able to accurately report their own impairment. Procedures must be in place for workers to disclose someone else's impairment.
- Supervisors can ask a worker to leave work or perform low-risk work until a formal assessment of fitness for work is completed.
- Impairment policies should support a worker's recovery (if they are impaired due to mental health or substance use issues) and should not be punitive.
- Managing complex issues like workplace impairment requires co-operation from all workplace parties.
- Consider implementing CSA standard *Z1008:21: Management of impairment in the workplace*. It provides guidance on controlling health and safety risks related to impairment and how to reduce its negative impacts.

Demonstrate

Point out any additional supports offered by the workplace, such as employee assistance programs, accommodation plans, healthcare benefits, and time off.

Encourage open communication and understanding among colleagues to ensure that everyone feels valued and supported.