

Workplaces and Substance Use: Forestry Industry

Summary

- In the forestry industry, about 5 in 10 (49%) workers and managers in safety-sensitive positions,¹ and 1 in 10 (11%) workers and managers in non-safety-sensitive positions² reported consuming alcohol or other drugs within two hours before or during work, or being hungover, intoxicated³ or feeling high while at work.
- About 1 in 4 forestry workers and managers thought it was **generally acceptable in their work culture to consume alcohol (24%) or cannabis (25%)** before or during work.
- About 3 in 5 (62%) forestry managers did not feel adequately trained to intervene with a worker who may be working impaired.
- To reduce workplace substance use risks, it is essential for managers in forestry to provide regular education, reduce stigma, change work culture, update policies, and offer appropriate supports and training.
- **The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) can provide employers and partners with resources, guidance, training and tailored services for managing workplace and substance use risks, as well as introduce protective factors.**

The Issue

Forming part of a workplace series, **this brief provides key context, data and suggestions on substance use health for employers and other partners (e.g., unions, associations, health professionals) in the forestry industry.**

Where we work, the type of work we do and the workplace culture surrounding us can have a significant impact on our well-being, including the use of alcohol or other drugs (i.e., substance use). Workplace risk and protective factors that impact substance use health⁴ can affect workers from any industry; however, these factors often differ across industries (Frone, 2006; European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2022).

¹ Safety-sensitive positions pose potential physical risk to self, co-workers, the public or the environment (e.g., heavy equipment operators, medical practitioners).

² Non-safety-sensitive positions pose low or no physical risk to self, co-workers, the public or the environment (e.g., office staff, retail clerk, website designer).

³ Note that the original survey language used “drunk” to be readily understood by a broad range of participants.

⁴ Like mental health, substance use health occurs along a spectrum and includes no use, beneficial use, lower risk use, up to substance use disorder (Community Addictions Peer Support Association, n.d.).



For people working in safety-sensitive positions, risks for using substances can be higher due to factors such as coping with stress, not seeking help, shift work, or managing pain or injuries (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2023; Public Health Ontario, 2022).

For employers, contractors, unions and other partners, lost productivity due to injuries, absences and disabilities related to substance use in Canada cost \$22.4 billion in 2020 (Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms, 2024).

Understanding the context of substance use among workers, managers and industry-specific risks is key to improving protective factors and worker health and safety.

The Study



We conducted a national study (that involved a survey, focus groups and interviews) of workers and managers from natural resource industries, including forestry, mining, and oil and gas.

Overall, we surveyed 400 people spanning five regions in Canada: The Atlantic provinces (4%), Quebec (23%), Ontario (15%), the Prairies (49%) and British Columbia (10%, including the Yukon and Northwest Territories, due to small numbers).

As part of this larger study, we additionally conducted focus groups with people from these industries as well as interviews with people with lived and living experience of substance use issues.

From forestry, we surveyed 48 workers and 17 managers. The information and insights gathered from the forestry industry are presented below.

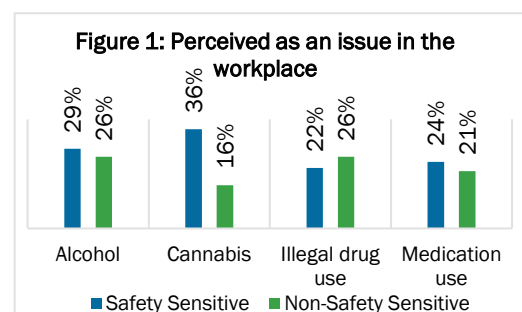
Key Findings

Extent of Substance Use

About 5 in 10 (49%) forestry workers and managers in safety-sensitive positions, and 1 in 10 (11%)* forestry workers and managers in non-safety-sensitive positions reported consuming alcohol or other drugs within two hours before or during work, or being hungover, intoxicated or feeling high while at work.

Additionally, about 3 in 10 (26%) forestry participants thought that substance use was an issue in their workplace (refer to the figure).*

These results indicate there is a need for better workplace prevention, education and supports on substance use.



Risk and Protective Factors

There are different risk and protective factors in the workplace that can influence substance use of workers and managers. Appropriately addressing these factors can benefit workers and workplaces.

* Interpret with caution due to small sample sizes.



The following are some of the most common risk and protective factors raised by participants from forestry:

1. **Workplace culture:** About 1 in 4 forestry participants thought it was generally acceptable in their work culture to consume alcohol (24%) or cannabis (25%) before or during work.
2. **Stigma:** About half (49%) of forestry participants felt that they could safely and confidentially tell their managers if they are experiencing alcohol or drug use issues without fear of discrimination, stigmatization or discipline.

“...Because guys typically, yeah, we don't talk about our stuff... **We kind of keep it on the down low if someone is having those issues.** We don't often bring it up and be the rat in the group.” (Participant)

3. **Return to work acceptance:** About 3 in 4 forestry participants felt comfortable if a fellow colleague returns to the same work duties as before (75%) or modified work duties (77%) after receiving treatment for substance use.
4. **Pain and fatigue:** Some participants in the forestry industry said that substances might be used to cope with working long hours and doing heavy physical labour.

“We might be working weeks straight and people do get tired. So, they **use those other substances to keep up with the tasks we have, and given the job is quite hard working, people get pain issues.**” (Participant)

5. **Remote sites:** Some participants reported that working on remote sites may contribute to risks for use due to higher pay, increased isolation and less supervision.

“**Remote sites are riskier** because the pay is higher and the propensity for substance abuse is higher.” (Participant)

Policies and Training

- **Policies:** About half (51%)* of forestry managers reported that policies existed on alcohol and other substances (it was not possible to assess the policies' quality). Several participants said policies need to be easily accessible, clear and focused on helping workers who consume substances.
- **Training:** About 3 in 5 (62%)* forestry managers did not feel adequately trained to intervene with a worker who they thought might be working impaired. Among

* Interpret with caution due to small sample sizes.



participants who reported being adequately trained, it was not possible to determine whether their training was appropriate for managing substance use–related situations.

Implications and Recommendations

Although workers and managers in forestry face various workplace risks that can contribute to substance use, **there are several opportunities to improve protective factors to reduce the risks.**

Risks such as stigma, workplace culture, managing injuries and pain, isolation and unclear policies, can be changed to improve worker well-being, safety and productivity.

Recommendations include:



1. Assessing substance use health–related needs at your workplace,
2. Educating and training workers and managers with evidence-based information on substance use health,
3. Developing clear, comprehensive policies and best practices tailored to your organizational needs,
4. Establishing trusted individuals for disclosure or peer support options,
5. Providing alternatives to substances when celebrating or socializing,
6. Offering supports to manage health and well-being, and
7. Offering resources for accessible, confidential and diverse supports.
 - Consult substance use resources available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/get-help-with-substance-use.html>

“[...If] someone had a problem, I would be happy to help ... and have a discussion with them, even if it’s not my job. It would make me happy ... to know that I helped them.” (Participant)

CCSA Services to Support Implementation

To help your organization work on these recommendations, CCSA can provide training, resources, guidance, and tailored services on managing workplace and substance use risk and protective factors. For more information about the study, training and how-to resources, email us at workplace@ccsa.ca.

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About CCSA

CCSA was created by Parliament to provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we provide national guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives.

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