

Workplaces and Substance Use: Oil and Gas Industry

Summary

- In the oil and gas industry, about 2 in 10 (23%) workers and managers in safety-sensitive positions¹ 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 10 (11%) oil and gas workers and managers thought that it was generally acceptable by their workplace culture to consume alcohol before or during work, while only 5% thought that this was acceptable for cannabis use.
- About 2 in 5 (40%) oil and gas managers did not feel adequately trained to intervene with a worker who they thought might be working impaired.
- To reduce workplace substance use risks, it is essential for managers in oil and gas to provide regular education, reduce stigma, change work culture, update policies, and offer appropriate support and training.
- The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) can provide employers and partners 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 oil and gas 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 risks 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.

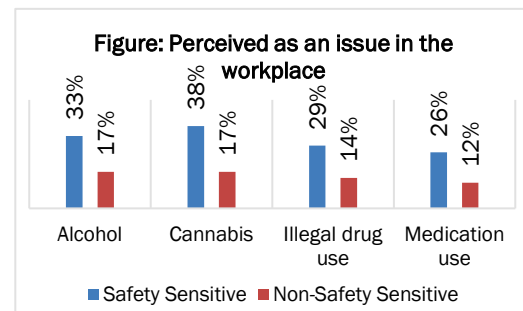
From oil and gas, we surveyed 164 workers and 84 managers. The information and insights gathered from the oil and gas industry are presented below.

Key Findings

Extent of Substance Use

About 2 in 10 (23%) oil and gas workers and managers in safety-sensitive positions and 1 in 10 (11%) 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, between 12% and 38% of oil and gas industry 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 among workers and managers. Appropriately addressing these factors can benefit workers and workplaces.



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

1. **Workplace culture:** About 1 in 10 (11%) oil and gas participants thought it was generally acceptable by their work culture to consume alcohol before or during work. Only 5% thought it was acceptable to use cannabis before or during work.
2. **Pressure to use:** Around 1 in 10 (6%) oil and gas participants felt pressured from co-workers to use alcohol or other drugs before or during work.
3. **Stigma:** About 6 in 10 (59%) oil and gas participants felt that they could safely and confidentially tell their managers if they were experiencing alcohol or drug use issues without fear of discrimination, stigmatization or discipline. Participants emphasized the importance of trust, empathy and that “confidentiality is a must” before talking about substance use challenges.
4. **Return to work acceptance:** About 8 in 10 oil and gas participants felt comfortable if a co-worker returned to the same (79%) or modified work duties (80%) following substance use treatment.

“Everybody should have everyone's back, so we all go home that day.” (Participant)

Policies and Training

- **Policies:** About 8 in 10 (81%) oil and gas managers reported that policies existed on alcohol and other substances (it was not possible to assess the policies’ quality). Some participants emphasized the importance of being clear and applying policies consistently.
- **Training:** 2 in 5 (40%) oil and gas managers did not feel adequately trained to intervene with an employee who they thought might be working impaired. Among 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 oil and gas 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, a toughness culture, and unclear policies, can be changed to improve worker well-being, safety and productivity.

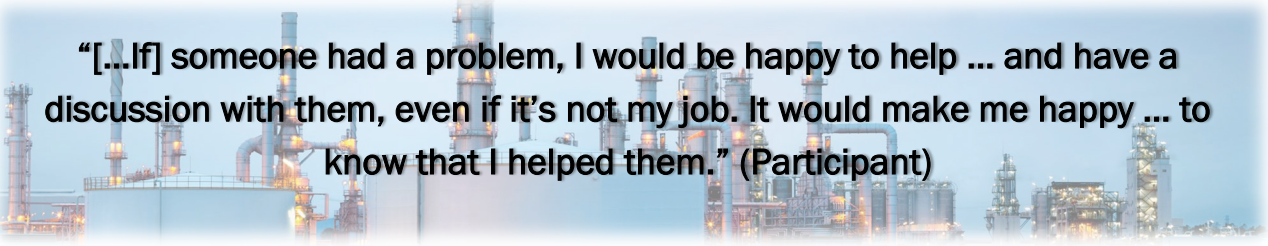
Recommendations include:



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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