

Workplaces and Substance Use

Safety-Sensitive Positions*



[We] need to openly talk about [substance use] and have support systems in place for anyone struggling with substance use. — Study participant



1 in 4 (25%) people working in **safety-sensitive positions** reported consuming alcohol or drugs 2 hours before or during work, or were hungover or felt high at work.



Of the people who reported consuming alcohol or drugs ...

5 in 10

usually worked and tried to **hide their use**

5 in 10

told their manager they could **not work for a different reason** (e.g., calling in sick)

4 in 10

told their manager they were **not fit to work** because they consumed alcohol or drugs

About **half of workers and managers** reported hiding their use because they:



Worried that they would **lose their job** or be suspended.



Worried **what other workers** would think of them.



Thought their workplace **policies or procedures discriminated or stigmatized** against people who might have alcohol or drug use issues.

Workers are less likely than managers to trust discussing substance use with their managers.



52%

of workers ...

64%

of managers ...



Reported thinking they can **safely and confidentially** tell their managers about substance use issues **without fear** of discrimination, stigma or discipline.



For some, fear prevents them from telling others that they have used a substance that might affect their work, if they are experiencing a substance use issue or seeking help.



Some businesses have improved approaches to managing substance use risks, such as developing comprehensive policies, training staff, offering accommodations, fostering peer support programs, and setting up mental and substance use health supports.

Contact us at workplace@ccsa.ca for training or for more information and resources such as our [trades toolkit](#).

Background: The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction conducted a national study about workplace policies and practices related to substance use and working in various industries. The information presented here is from workers and managers in safety-sensitive positions who participated in a survey and focus groups, and individuals affected by substance use.

Suggested citation: Meister, S., Barker, B., Dassieu, L., Wood, S., Beirness, D., & Cragg, S. (2025). *Substance use and the workplace — stigma: Safety-sensitive positions* [Infographic]. Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

*Safety-sensitive positions pose potential risks to self, co-workers, the public or the environment (e.g., airline pilots, heavy equipment operators, medical practitioners).