WEEK 52 HOLIDAY SEASON, LATE DECEMBER · ~5 MIN READ · ONTARIO CONSTRUCTION

Impairment: Alcohol, Cannabis & Medications

Holiday parties, late nights, and a few drinks are part of the season. But a hangover, last night's cannabis, or a new cold medicine can leave you impaired on site this morning — and you may not feel it. The standard isn't what you took or when; it's whether you're fit to do safety-sensitive work right now.

The hazard

Alcohol, cannabis, and plenty of prescription and over-the-counter medications slow reactions, blur judgement, and cause drowsiness. Effects can last well past the point where someone feels "back to normal," and hangover effects are impairment too. On a construction site that means missed hazards and bad decisions around machines, heights, and traffic — a risk to you and to the crew beside you. **Legal use doesn't make it safe to work impaired**, and it doesn't change the employer's duty to keep the workplace safe.

What to do

- **Show up fit for work** — rested, clear-headed, able to do your task safely. That's the test, every shift.
- **Don't consume alcohol or cannabis at work**, including breaks, and don't come to work impaired. **Follow your employer's policy** — it will be more specific than any rule of thumb, and it's the one that applies to you.
- **Check your medication.** If a label says it may cause drowsiness or not to operate machinery, that matters. **A pharmacist can tell you how it affects safety-sensitive work** and whether there's an alternative — often the quickest and most private way to sort it out.
- **Report the limitation, not your medical history.** If something affects your ability to do a task safely, tell your supervisor **what you can't safely do today** — you don't have to disclose a diagnosis or a prescription to do that. A reassignment is an ordinary outcome.
- **Plan a safe ride home from holiday events**, and give yourself real recovery time. A big night and a 6 a.m. start don't mix.
- **If a coworker seems off, say something** — quietly to them if you can, and to a supervisor. **Then let the supervisor handle it.** It isn't your job to police a workmate, and it isn't your call to make about anyone's fitness — your job is to make sure it doesn't get ignored.
- **Supervisors:** remove the person from the safety-sensitive task, keep it confidential and non-punitive, arrange a safe way home, and follow the assessment process. Remember that dependence and prescribed medication can bring **accommodation obligations** — this is a fitness and support process, not automatically a discipline one.

Watch out for

- Hangover effects — slow reactions, shaky hands, poor focus. That's still impaired.
- "It's legal, so it's fine." Legal doesn't mean safe to work on.
- New or changed medication. The first few days often hit hardest.
- A crew covering for someone rather than raising it — that helps nobody, including them.

Talk it over

- Does everyone here know our fit-for-work policy, and where to read it?
- If you weren't safe to work one morning, who would you tell, and what would happen next?
- If you started a new medication tomorrow, who would you ask about it before your shift?

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