OCCUPATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

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MÉDECINE DU TRAVAIL ET DE
L'ENVIRONNEMENT

**POSITION STATEMENT ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF CANNABIS USE
FOR SAFETY-SENSITIVE WORK**

The Occupational and Environmental Medical Association of Canada (OEMAC) is the largest national association of physicians with an interest in occupational and environmental medicine (OEM).

OEMAC serves as a unified voice for OEM in Canada and as an evidence-based organization it upholds its members' responsibility to ensure the health and safety of the working individual as well as worker populations, and it supports affirmative measures to ensure health and safety in the workplace. With this mission in mind, the present Position Statement aims to help OEMAC members navigate and advise on the implications of cannabis use on safety-sensitive work.

OEMAC recognizes that current evidence indicates cannabis is the most commonly encountered agent in workplace drug testing in Canada, and second to alcohol, the most prevalent substance implicated in driving under the influence.

OEMAC further recognizes the following evidence-based and expert-consensus based knowledge and statements:

- Cannabis is derived from the cannabis plant and delivers various pharmacologically active agents to the consumer.

- Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the principal psychoactive constituent of cannabis.

- THC is fat-soluble and can accumulate in the body resulting in prolonged exposure of the brain to the substance over time even after discontinuation of consumption. The risk for impairment may continue while the substance washes out of the body's fat stores and the brain continues to be exposed to it.

- The full extent of the effects of prolonged THC exposure to the brain is unknown.

- Cannabis use is associated with a wide range of adverse effects including short-term impairment of memory, motor coordination, and judgment, driving, and risk of injury.

- Aside from intoxication, cannabis is considered to be addictive and associated with the potential for the development of cannabis use disorder (cannabis dependence, addiction) as well as cannabis withdrawal.

- The presence of cannabis results in an increased risk of road traffic accidents, likely more than doubling the crash risk.

- The impairing effects of cannabis are expected to decrease with time following cannabis use and with the ensuing metabolism and elimination from the body of the pharmacologically active compounds. However, we recognize the considerable uncertainty around the extent and duration of impairment, especially taking into account individual differences between workers.

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- The impairing effect of cannabis, which is broader than the syndrome of intoxication, may be enhanced when the substance is used with other impairing compounds, including alcohol.

- Based on limited data, OEMAC concludes that the duration of impairment may exist for 24 hours or longer after use, and the user may be unaware of the impairing effects. More research is needed to delineate the duration of effect more precisely.

With respect to workers in safety-sensitive settings, and with the aim of ensuring the health and safety of the individual as well as worker populations, OEMAC draws attention to the following conclusive statements:

1. Irrespective of the source of procurement, the use of cannabis can lead to impairment, which may adversely impact the performance of individuals at work.

2. It is recognized that the timing and duration of cannabis impairment is variable and that more research is needed in this regard. To provide practical guidance, until definitive evidence is available, it is not advisable to operate motor vehicles or equipment, or engage in other safety-sensitive tasks for 24 hours following cannabis consumption, or for longer if impairment persists.

3. In light of the legislative change, it is recommended that employers update relevant workplace drug and alcohol policies to address the use of cannabis and the mitigation of occupational risk.

4. Education and training on the risks of cannabis use as well as the recognition of impairment, and the treatment options available to employees with substance use issues, for both employers and employees, is advisable.

5. More research is needed to adequately study cannabis-related impairment, including methods for the detection of impairment as well as the further implications of the legalization of cannabis on the individual, the workplace, and on human resources policies and practices.

Endorsement, acknowledgement, and disclaimer:

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As with any guidance document, application of this Position Statement to individual circumstances must be considered in the context of the specific situation and should take into account both the nature of cannabis use, and the safety-sensitive work in question.

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