



## MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION AND THE *workplace*

**With medical and recreational marijuana becoming more prevalent, legality doesn't mean there aren't consequences.**

**By Tonya Sorenson, MS, LMAC | First Step Recovery of The Village**

**W**hether for medical or recreational use, the debate on the legalization of marijuana use continues to grow. Many employers question whether the use of marijuana, medical or not, impacts workplace safety and policies.

The Business Daily News article “How Employers Are Reacting to the Legalization of Marijuana” states that **the legality of cannabis is not the issue**. After all, alcohol consumption is legal for those ages 21 and older, but employees still face consequences if they are under the influence of alcohol at work. Legal or not, marijuana use can also result in consequences for employees.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) states that THC in marijuana affects depth perception, reaction time, coordination, and other motor skills, and creates sensory distortion. For someone operating machinery, driving a forklift, or delivering products in a vehicle, these effects can be deadly.

Employees who tested positive for marijuana had 55% more industrial accidents, 85% more injuries, and 75% greater absenteeism compared to those who tested negative, according to a study reported by NIDA. These statistics correspond to decreases in productivity, higher turnover rates, increases in worker compensation and unemployment compensation claims, and lawsuits, all of which negatively impact the organization's bottom line.

Short-term effects of marijuana include impaired body movement, difficulty with thinking and problem-solving, memory problems, and an altered sense of time, NIDA says.

Determining whether employees and job applicants are using cannabis on the job or on their own time is more difficult, Matt C. Pinsker, a former adjunct professor of homeland security and criminal justice at the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs of Virginia Commonwealth University, says in the Business Daily News article.

“For employers, a key issue involving marijuana is not legalization, but workplace safety,” said Pinsker, who is also a criminal defense attorney. “The problem for employers is that impairment, because of marijuana, is usually much more difficult to detect and test for than alcohol. Unlike alcohol, it is very difficult for employers to determine if a positive drug test for marijuana is the result of drug usage during work or on non-work hours, so it is logistically simpler to just have an outright ban.”

So, whether legalized recreational use of marijuana is part of your state's future, the fact remains that employers have to protect their employees and themselves, and legalization may have no effect on your workplace's drug-free policies.