

Mike Doyle is the President of the CAGC – the Canadian Association of Geophysical Contractors - representing the business interests of the seismic industry within Canada. The CAGC website may be found at www.cagc.ca.

Tick tock – times are tough – probably the toughest of times for many of us so far in our work careers. However governments never slow down. There are always new files are coming out that affect us. One of the most recent is the legalization of marijuana.

Find following the submissions of Enform Canada to the Task Force on the Legalization, Regulation and Restriction of Marijuana in Canada.

Enform is a national safety association for Canada's upstream oil and gas industry and has offices in Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Enform was created by the oil and gas industry as a not-for-profit organization dedicated to meeting industry's safety needs.

Given pressing safety concerns in the upstream oil and gas industry, in August 2005, an Alcohol and Drug Task Force was created under Enform and consists of representatives from CAGC, CAODC, CAPP, CEPA, PSAC and EPAC. Through the guidance of the Enform Alcohol and Drug Task Force, Enform has developed numerous tools for employers to address the issue of alcohol and drugs in the workplace, including the Alcohol and Drug Policy Model for the Canadian Upstream Petroleum Industry.

The legalization of marijuana will have an adverse impact on workplace safety and on an employer's ability to ensure a safe work environment. Enform respectfully submits that any legislation that is considered must address the obligations of employers to maintain a safe work environment and the workplace safety risks associated with marijuana use and abuse.

Studies confirm there is a correlation between marijuana use and injury. A study by Goodwin et al. in April 2003 looked at nearly 65,000 subjects, of whom, over 13,000 were current marijuana users. The study found that male marijuana users had a 28% higher rate of hospitalization due to injuries than non-users and female users had a 37% higher rate of the same.

There can be no doubt that marijuana use is incompatible with working in a safety-sensitive workplace. There are psychomotor and cognitive deficits associated with use of marijuana, including hallucinations, visual disturbances, inability to concentrate, decreased motor control, decreased ability to respond quickly to events and an inability to drive safely. People under the influence of marijuana have poor short-term memories. Marijuana use by drivers has been associated with increased accidents and fatalities.

Studies reviewing the effects of marijuana have concluded that "any situation in which safety both for self and others depends upon alertness and capability of control of man-machine interaction precludes the use of marijuana". Similarly, a 2006 study of marijuana users found that marijuana use was associated with lower alertness and slower response times; performance deficits which pose

unique safety risks in hazardous work environments. The 2006 study found that users experienced working memory problems at the start and psychomotor slowing and poorer episodic recall at the end of the work week. The authors concluded that the results suggested a “hangover” type effect and a subtle effect on cognitive function, more apparent under cognitive load and fatigue. Another study surveyed almost 8,000 UK residents and found that cannabis use was associated with significant detrimental impacts on safety, with those admitting to cannabis use having a 34% increased reporting of a work-related incident and a 17% increase in minor injuries at work. Reporting of work-related road collisions increased by 3-fold amongst marijuana users.

Performance deficits associated with cannabis that are incompatible with working in a safety-sensitive environment have been demonstrated to last after use. Studies have indicated that performance deficits can last up to 2 days after use of low doses of marijuana. In a study involving 9 pilots ingesting 20 mg of THC, the use of marijuana adversely affected performance at 24 hours after smoking. While 7 of the 9 pilots showed some degree of deficits at 24 hours after smoking, only one reported any awareness of the drug’s effects. The authors indicated the data “suggest that very complex human/machine performance can be impaired as long as 24 hours after smoking a moderate social dose of marijuana, and that the user may be unaware of the drug’s influence...Any time our limited capacity working memory is presented with more information than it is able to process, marijuana carry-over effects may occur”.

Studies have also confirmed additional performance deficits are associated with long-term chronic marijuana use. One study showed that chronic daily users had significantly poorer cognitive and psychomotor performance deficits than occasional users throughout 3 weeks of abstinence. Chronic daily users were also slower in initiating responses and have poor performance on critical tasks.

There is also a recognized abstinence and withdrawal syndrome. This is recognized by the DSM V. A study by the Harvard Medical School examined heavy marijuana users and whether being abstinent resulted in any observable adverse effects. It was found that abstinent heavy users experienced clear adverse effects, including anxiety and violent and aggressive behaviour, for 3 to 7 days and, for some, as long as 28 days.

As discussed above, any legislation or regulation on marijuana use will have a significant impact on employers in the upstream oil and gas sector and their ability to ensure a safe work environment. The implications of an employee attending work unfit for duty in a safety-sensitive work environment can, and has, resulted in serious safety consequences that could affect not only workers, but also the environment, surrounding communities and the public. The public interest is paramount and must be considered as part of the implementation of any legislation regarding marijuana use. Marijuana use is incompatible with working in a safety-sensitive environment. Therefore, at a minimum, there must be an express prohibition on the use of marijuana in safety-sensitive workplaces. There must also be an express prohibition on using marijuana in close temporal proximity to attending work on a safety-sensitive worksite. An express prohibition

on the possession, storage, use or sale of marijuana on safety-sensitive workplaces or facilities associated with those workplaces must also be included.

Don't Worry, Be Happy.....

From the Thursday Files:

Second star to the right and straight on 'til morning.

~ J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan // Captain James T. Kirk in Star Trek VI – The Undiscovered Country