

Employers in a fog on legal marijuana: HR group

Government urged to offer more guidance

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TORONTO Many employers feel unprepared for marijuana legalization and urge the government to step in to clear the smoke about workplace policies, according to a report by Canada's largest human resources professionals regulator.

Forty-five per cent of respondents to a member survey do not believe their current workplace policies address potential issues that could arise due to marijuana legalization, expected next Canada Day, the Human Resources Professionals Association found in a report released Thursday.

"It is crucial that governments at all levels provide employers and employees with specific guidance on how to operate within this new environment," The HRPA report said.

Cannabis in the workplace is nothing new: employers have had to accommodate medical users since a court ruling in 2001, but the HRPA expects workplace incidents to in-

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crease once it's legal and as the number of medical users grows.

Survey respondents' major concern was workplace safety, but they also said they are concerned about issues such as attendance, decreased work performance and increased insurance claims.

Employers are concerned that legalization will result in increased impairment in the workplace and a resulting increase in accidents. They feel ill-equipped to detect and enforce marijuana use, the report said.

One of the main problems HR professionals identified is a clear-cut definition for, or way to test for, impairment. Unlike alcohol, there is no scientific consensus on what constitutes "impairment."

"The government should set a clear legal definition of 'impairment' and the grounds under which an employee can be tested in relation to cannabis use," the HRPA recommends in the report.

It asks that products be clearly labelled THC amounts to help provide an indicator of impairment levels.

In the legalization bill, the government recommends a safe driving limit of between zero and two nanograms of THC (the main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis) per millilitre of blood, but given the nascency of the drug, it is not clear how much that equates to in practice.

The survey of 650 members found just 11 per cent of workplaces have policies in place to address medical marijuana.

The association called for the government to maintain a distinct class of users who need marijuana for medical reasons in order to better determine whether they have a legal duty to accommodate the employee's use.

Very few companies provide insurance coverage for medical marijuana, something patient advocacy groups are fighting to achieve.

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