Impairment Environmental Scan
Employer Survey Results
National Safety Council

Partial Survey Report
February 2021
1 TABLE OF CONTENTS

2 Executive Summary

3 Methodology
   3.1 Background and Objectives
   3.2 Timeline
   3.3 Questionnaire Development
   3.4 Survey Administration
   3.5 Sample

4 Respondent Profile

5 Results
   5.1 Defining Impairment
   5.2 Employer Impairment Concerns
      5.2.1 Substances and Conditions
      5.2.2 Organizational Impact of Employee Impairment
2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Multiple recent reports indicate spikes in opioid overdoses and ongoing concerns about mental distress and substance use disorders related to COVID-19. As a result, employers are finding themselves with an expanding list of issues that are threatening the health and wellbeing of their employees.

In response to these issues, the National Safety Council, the nation’s leading nonprofit safety advocate, is calling on employers to take a broader approach to addressing workplace impairment. Specifically, NSC urges that employer policies and procedures outline workplace impairment as anything that could impede one’s ability to function normally or safely as a result of a number of factors – from chemical substances, such as alcohol, opioids or cannabis, to physical factors like fatigue, as well as experiencing mental distress and social factors like stress.

In May and June 2020, NSC conducted a national employer survey targeting decision makers (HR Decision Makers, Safety Professionals and Managers) for organizations with at least 50 or more employees across several different U.S.-based industries. NSC aimed to investigate the awareness and impact of impairment in the workplace, understand current impairment policies and practices, and gather insights from survey respondents about several NSC impairment-related concepts. The following report includes findings from the survey related to awareness and impact of impairment. Additional results will be available at a future date.

Results
The survey results are based on 350 online surveys, which found:

- There is a general acceptance of the NSC description of impairment among employers
- 90% of employers say they are concerned about alcohol, illicit opioids, mental health disorders, chronic stress and illicit prescription opioids in their workplaces
- More than half of respondents – 52% – said impairment is decreasing the safety of their workforce
- A majority of respondents – 77% – view impairment as an important consideration when determining an employee's fitness for duty
- However, an alarming 13% claimed that impairment was not an important consideration when determining fitness for duty
- 68% view impairment as a justifiable reason to fire an employee
3  METHODOLOGY

3.1  BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The National Safety Council (NSC) partnered with a sample provider to conduct a survey with employers about their awareness of impairment; beliefs about the impact of impairment in the workplace; how current policies, practices, and trainings cover impairment; and where the greatest potential lies for NSC to influence and support employers regarding worker impairment.

3.2  TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology Development</th>
<th>March 2020 – April 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey Development and Review</td>
<td>April 2020 – May 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Administration</td>
<td>May 18, 2020 – June 2, 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3  QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

The content of the Employer Impairment Survey originated from a compilation of the findings from an NSC literature review and expert advisory panel focus groups. The questionnaire development team included NSC impairment subject matter experts and NSC survey/market researchers. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit opinions from employers – specifically HR, Management, and Safety Professionals with decision making authority – about key impairment elements such as describing impairment, concerns and impact, policies, procedures, and to gauge interest in NSC content and resources. The final questionnaire consisted of 45 questions, including several matrix style questions eliciting level of agreement with multiple statements.

3.4  SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

The questionnaire was administered in an online, incentivized format. NSC survey researchers programmed, hosted, collected, and analyzed all survey data. NSC partnered with a third party provider to access the sample. Participants were sent an email from the third party sample provider with a link to complete the survey. The third party sample provider managed all the incentives for survey completion.

3.5  SAMPLE

This report builds on 350 online surveys with three types of employer decision makers representing U.S. employers with 50 or more employees:

**HR Decision Makers:** Professionals who are involved in formulating employee / human resources policies affecting the recruitment, retention and well-being of the workforce.
Safety Professionals: Mid/senior management level safety professionals, involved in workplace policies and initiatives surrounding risk management and safety protocols, inspection, training and/or monitoring.

Managers: Mid/senior management level decision makers who may not be directly involved in HR or safety policy, but oversee, approve or sign-off initiatives, investments, training and workplace priorities.
4 **RESPONDENT PROFILE**

350 Respondents

- HR, Management, Safety Professionals, across the U.S., with organizational decision making authority
- Across Industrial, Professional Services, Public & Social Services, and Retail Industries
- Employers with at least 50 employees
5 RESULTS

5.1 DEFINING IMPAIRMENT

Participants were provided the NSC definition of impairment:

Impairment: The inability to function normally or safely from a change in behavior resulting from chemical substances (e.g., alcohol, opioids, cannabis), physical factors (e.g., fatigue), social factors (e.g., professional and other stressors), or mental health well-being (e.g., illness and other factors).

Overall, there were positive reactions to the NSC Impairment definition indicating a strong level of agreement. When prompted to provide a reasoning for their level of agreement, many responded it was a good, accurate, comprehensive, and covers multiple factors.

This indicates that the NSC holistic definition of impairment is an accepted concept with employers.

93% Agreement with NSC Impairment Definition
5.2 **EMPLOYER IMPAIRMENT CONCERNS**

5.2.1 **Substances and Conditions**

Next, participants were asked to categorize substances and conditions from a ‘Major Concern’ to ‘Not a Concern at All’ regarding substances and conditions related to impairment.

**Alcohol, illicit opioids, mental health disorders, chronic stress, and illicit prescription opioid pain relievers** all had over 90% of respondents overall indicate that these substances or conditions are a concern within their workplace.

**Illicit opioids, alcohol, illegal stimulants, and mental health disorders** each were identified as **major concerns** for at least 60% of respondents. When looking at these four substances and conditions by industry, unsurprisingly, a larger percentage of decision makers in Industrial (67%) indicated that alcohol is a major concern, while less than half of Industrial (46%) indicated mental health disorders as a major concern, which was significantly lower than the other industry groups. In regards to illegal stimulants, this was widely seen as a major concern for Retail and Wholesale Trade (75%).

**Tobacco** was widely viewed as the **least concerning substance** as a whole, though it was still viewed as a concern for 74% of the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance/Condition</th>
<th>Major Concern</th>
<th>Minor Concern</th>
<th>Not a Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, heart disease)</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic stress</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal marijuana/cannabis</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal stimulants (e.g., cocaine, methamphetamine)</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illicit opioids (e.g., heroin, fentanyl)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illicit prescription anti-anxiety medications (e.g., Xanax, Ativan, Valium, Klonopin)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illicit prescription opioid pain relievers (e.g., Vicodin, Percocet, OxyContin)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illicit prescription stimulants (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal or prescription/medical marijuana/cannabis</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health disorders</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other illicit drugs</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription anti-anxiety medications (e.g., Xanax, Ativan, Valium, Klonopin)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription opioid pain relievers (e.g., Vicodin, Percocet, OxyContin)</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription stimulants (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin)</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco (e.g., vaping, cigarettes, snuff)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Major Concerns by Industry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Alcohol (%)</th>
<th>Illegal stimulants (e.g., cocaine, methamphetamine)</th>
<th>Illicit opioids (e.g., heroin, fentanyl)</th>
<th>Mental health disorders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>67.27%</td>
<td>62.73%</td>
<td>65.45%</td>
<td>46.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public &amp; Social Services</td>
<td>52.17%</td>
<td>55.43%</td>
<td>58.70%</td>
<td>60.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>55.00%</td>
<td>52.50%</td>
<td>57.50%</td>
<td>65.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail and Wholesale</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>67.80%</td>
<td>67.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>52.50%</td>
<td>55.00%</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impairment Environmental Scan Employer Survey Results

Major Concern
- Illicit opioids (e.g., heroin, fentanyl)
- Alcohol
- Chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, heart disease)
- Tobacco (e.g., vaping, cigarettes, snuff)
- Prescription stimulants (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin)
- Prescription opioids (e.g., Vicodin, Percocet, OxyContin)
- Fatigue
- Mental health disorders
- Legal or prescription medical marijuana/cannabis
- Chronic stress
- Prescription anti-anxiety medications (e.g., Xanax, Alprazolam)
- Other illicit drugs
- Illicit prescription stimulants (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin)
- Illicit prescription opioids (e.g., Vicodin, Percocet, OxyContin)
- Prescription anti-anxiety medications (e.g., Xanax, Alprazolam, Valium, ...)

Minor Concern
- Prescription stimulants (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin)
- Tobacco (e.g., vaping, cigarettes, snuff)
- Prescription anti-anxiety medications (e.g., Xanax, Alprazolam, ...)
- Chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, heart disease)
- Fatigue
- Illicit prescription anti-anxiety medications (e.g., Xanax, ...)
- Legal or prescription medical marijuana/cannabis
- Prescription opioid pain relievers (e.g., Vicodin, Percocet, ...)
- Illicit marijuana/cannabis
- Chronic stress
- Illicit prescription stimulants (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin)
- Illicit prescription opioid pain relievers (e.g., Vicodin, Percocet, ...)
- Mental health disorders
- Alcohol
- Other illicit drugs
- Illegal stimulants (e.g., cocaine, methamphetamine)
- Illicit opioids (e.g., heroin, fentanyl)

Not a Concern
- Tobacco (e.g., vaping, cigarettes, snuff)
- Legal or prescription medical marijuana/cannabis
- Prescription stimulants (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin)
- Prescription anti-anxiety medications (e.g., Xanax, Alprazolam, ...)
- Other illicit drugs
- Illicit prescription anti-anxiety medications (e.g., Xanax, ...)
- Illegal stimulants (e.g., cocaine, methamphetamine)
- Fatigue
- Prescription opioid pain relievers (e.g., Vicodin, Percocet, ...)
- Illicit prescription stimulants (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin)
- Chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, heart disease)
- Illicit marijuana/cannabis
- Illicit prescription opioid pain relievers (e.g., Vicodin, Percocet, ...)
- Illicit opioids (e.g., heroin, fentanyl)
- Mental health disorders
- Chronic stress
- Alcohol
5.2.2 Organizational Impact of Employee Impairment

To better understand the organizational impact of impairment, survey participants were asked to rate their level of agreement from strongly agree to strongly disagree for a variety of statements regarding impact, such as impairment is a problem in my workforce, impairment is decreasing safety, impairment is making it difficult to keep qualified employees, etc. Overall the results show that at least 1/3 of employers recognize that impairment is impacting their organization across different areas including safety, retention, productivity, safety, finances, and reputation. There were no significant differences across the board by industry. Of note, 68% view impairment as a justifiable reason to fire an employee and slightly more than half (51%) see impairment as a threat to their company's reputation. While 77% of respondents view impairment as an important consideration when determining an employee's fitness for duty, an alarming 13% claimed that it was not an important consideration when determining fitness for duty.

- 52% of respondents stated that impairment is decreasing the safety of their workforce
- 43% respondents claim that impairment has increased worker's compensation costs
- 45% say impairment is causing more near misses
- 39% say impairment is causing more injuries
- 36% of respondents indicated that impairment is a problem in their workforce