



Employer Perceptions on Workplace Impairment

Impairment has been a workplace safety issue for decades. The pandemic, however, forced a new era of workplace safety, one where employers are grappling with increased substance use and misuse as well as increased mental health concerns, including depression and anxiety – medical conditions that are frequently interrelated.

In particular, the pandemic has worsened the country's overdose crisis, which has been challenging employers for several years. In 2021, there were an estimated 107,000 overdose deaths – the highest number ever recorded.

The National Safety Council defines impairment as the inability to function normally or safely as a result of a number of factors – from chemical substances (e.g., alcohol, opioids, cannabis), physical factors (e.g., fatigue and certain medical conditions), social factors (e.g., professional and other stressors) and mental distress (e.g., related illness and other factors).

In 2020, NSC conducted a national employer survey on impairment and here are some of the key findings:



93% agreed with the NSC expanded definition of impairment



Over 90% said they are concerned about alcohol, opioids, mental health disorders and chronic stress in their workplaces



52% said impairment is decreasing the safety of their workforce



77% viewed impairment as an important consideration when determining an employee's fitness for duty, but an alarming **13%** claimed impairment was not an important consideration when determining fitness for duty



70% said they discuss substance impairment during employee onboarding, but only **47%** said they discuss other forms of impairment, such as fatigue, mental health and stress



45% said impairment is causing more near misses



39% said impairment is causing more injuries



Less than half of respondents believed most employees would feel comfortable telling their co-workers (**46%**) or supervisors (**44%**) if they were too impaired to perform their job

Visit nsc.org/impairment to get additional details on recognizing the signs of impairment and the latest resources.

Source: Impairment Environmental Scan Employer Survey Results, National Safety Council, February 2021