Impairment at Work – Reporting and Responding



Why should impairment be reported?

This document covers information about reporting and responding to impairment in the workplace.

If impairment is suspected, employers should consider if there is a risk to the individual's safety or the safety of others. For example, while impaired:

- Does the person have the ability to perform the job or task safely (e.g., driving, operating machinery, use of sharp objects)?
- Is there an impact on cognitive ability or judgement?

As with any hazard, and as part of their education and training, employees and supervisors will receive education and training to be able to be aware of the signs and symptoms of impairment. If anyone suspects impairment in others or wishes to report their own inability to work safely, this concern should be reported to the supervisor or delegated person(s). Any supervisor or delegated person who received this report will then respond to the concern.

What is an example of a reporting suspected impairment tool?

A sample tool is below. Be sure to customize this tool to suit the needs of your workplace.

Reporting should have based on observation – do not assume that, for example, substance abuse is the cause of impairment. Reporting impairment as a hazard is an alert that there are signs of concern. Reporting is one step in the investigation process.

Sample Tool – Reporting Suspected Impairment

Employee Name:			
Date of Incident:			
Description of Incident:			
Behaviour:	❑ Nervous?	❑ Insulting?	❑ Sleepy?
	❑ Exaggerated politeness?	❑ Confused?	❑ Combative?
	❑ Excited?	❑ Quarrelsome?	❑ Fatigued?
	❑ Uncooperative?	❑ Poor memory?	❑ Overly talkative?
	❑ Others (please describe)?		
Unusual Actions:	❑ Sweating?	❑ Slow reactions?	❑ Crying?
	❑ Quick moving?	❑ Tremors?	❑ Fighting?
	❑ Other (please describe)?		
Speech:	❑ Slurred?	❑ Slow?	❑ Confused?
	❑ Thick?	❑ Rambling?	❑ Pressured?
	❑ Other (please describe)?		
Balance:	❑ Falling?	❑ Staggering or unsteady gait?	❑ Unsure?
	❑ Needs support?	❑ Stumbling?	❑ Normal?
	❑ Other (please describe)?		
Witnesses/Other Employees Involved:			
Supervisor Actions:			
Consequence:			
Planned Follow-up:			
Signature:	Date:		

What should be done if impairment is suspected?

If a supervisor or co-worker becomes aware of an employee who is showing signs of impairment (regardless of cause) either through a suspected impairment report or observation, it is very important that action is taken. Examples of steps to take include but are not limited to:

- Speak to the employee in a private area to discuss their behaviour.
- If the person is in crisis and needs immediate assistance, go to the emergency department of the nearest hospital or call 9-1-1.
- Ask another supervisor or designated person to be present as a witness.
- Remove any stigma regarding substance use. State the concern is about safety for others and themselves.
- State your concerns about safety to the employee and request that they

explain what is going on.
- Based on employee response, discuss options, where applicable and available.
- Follow the steps outlined in your organization’s program. In some cases, it may be necessary to assign non-safety sensitive work, or to ask the employee to stop their work.
- If applicable, notify senior management and/or union representative.
- Be familiar with available resources and supports (e.g., Employee Assistance Programs, or agencies within the local community), and help employees seek treatment as necessary. Encourage access and use of support programs, and reassure the employee that the services are voluntary and confidential.
- If necessary, call a taxi or have employee escorted home. Do not allow them to drive if you suspect impairment.
- If disciplinary action is required, follow your organization’s policies on progressive discipline
- If necessary, follow procedures for accommodation.

Every discussion should be accompanied by an incident report. The report should include the events preceding the incident, identification of the employee’s unsafe work practices, the matters discussed with the employee, that management and union representatives were notified, a list of all actions taken, and any recommendations made to the employee.

Recall it is not the employer or supervisor’s duty to diagnose an employee, or to know if they have a disability. Employers can observe changes in an employee’s attendance, performance, or behaviour. They can initiate a discussion about the issue(s) as related to work, and discuss possible solutions. The discussion between the employer and employee may need to occur more than once. Document all discussions. Provide support and practice empathy, not sympathy. Focus on solutions, but if disciplinary action is necessary, it is important to follow through

How can concerns about impairment and safety be stated?

The supervisor or a delegated person should have a conversation with any individual who is suspected of being impaired at work. It is best to explore the situation and gather information before coming o conclusions. Stating the concerns should be done in an unbiased and factual manner. Do not place blame or make assumptions. Express the concerns by using statements such as:

- We would like to talk to you as we have noticed the following actions or behaviours lately. We are concerned for your safety and that you or someone else may get hurt.
- It was reported that you were almost involved in an incident. Can we discuss what happened leading to this event?
- You don’t seem yourself today and we are concerned. Can we talk?
- Are you okay?
- For your safety and the safety of others, we would like to discuss…

Be clear that the intent is to maintain a safe working environment or that the organization is concerned for their well-being. Be prepared to listen to the individual. Do not make assumptions about the cause of the issue. Identify any consequences if the issue continues and what steps must be taken.

Discuss and outline what each party will do and when to improve the issue. Document this discussion. If necessary, determine a time to meet again when the employee is not showing signs of impairment to discuss further.

What is an example of how to document a suspected impairment incident?

Every discussion should be documented by an incident response report. The report should include the events that happened before the incident, identification of the employee’s unsafe work practices, the matters discussed with the employee (while maintaining confidentiality), that management and union representatives were notified if applicable, a list of all actions taken, and any recommendations made to the employee.

A sample tool may be as follows. Be sure to customize this tool to suit your workplace needs.

Sample Tool – Responding to Suspected Impairment	
Employee Name:	**Date:**
Supervisor Name:	
Observer Name:	
Incidient or Concern Details	
Action **Note: If there is concern employee may be or may become violent or threatening, or may be in need of medical assistance, call security, police, or 911.**	
Observations	
Concerns regarding safety, health, or other work-related issues	
Details from discussion with employee	
Discussion of available services, if applicable	
Safe arrangements (driven by/taxi, other work assigned, etc.)	
Next steps / Return to work process	

Notifications made to:	
Signatures	
Employee:	**Date:**
Supervisor:	**Date:**
Observer:	**Date:**

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