

Joint News Release

For Immediate Release
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Union construction sector develops first-ever Drug and Alcohol Policy for construction worksites

BC's construction unions and their employers have developed a groundbreaking substance abuse testing and treatment policy which will continue to enhance safety for union workers on the job and provide treatment and rehabilitation services for workers with substance abuse problems.

As part of their negotiations for the current standard agreement, the unions and employers agreed to develop such a policy which would apply to all union construction workers in BC. It is believed to be the only such industry-wide agreement in Canada.

Under the policy, testing can be done on employees who are involved in workplace accidents or near-misses, and when there is reasonable suspicion of impairment on the job. Employees may also be subject to testing required by clients or project owners prior to starting work on a new project, but the policy has a voluntary testing option under which workers can be excused from such pre-access testing.

The testing protocol is designed to test for current impairment only; the objective is to ensure sobriety on the job without prying into the private after-hours activities of workers. The program tests for alcohol and for nine common drugs including marijuana.

"With this program in place we can assure our clients and the general public and our employees that this policy will help make our worksites substance free, and any worker who tests positive for drugs is immediately taken off the job," said Clyde Scollan, President of Construction Labour Relations Association which speaks on behalf of unionized contractors in BC.

“This policy will enhance safety, productivity and service quality for union construction workers right across the province,” said Scollan. “Our plan provides consistent, fair and manageable procedures for detecting, eliminating and treating substance abuse which stands to impair performance on the job.”

Mark Olsen, Business Manager of Construction and Specialized Workers Union (Labourers) Local 1611, who is president of the Bargaining Council of BC Building Trades Unions, said the new policy will increase safety on the job for union construction workers. “Construction work is dangerous enough without the added perils of having impaired workers on the job site,” he said.

Olsen also noted that, unlike some workplace alcohol and drug policies in force elsewhere across Canada, this policy only determines cannabis impairment at the time the test is taken on the job site. “We opted for a non-invasive testing policy which is designed to measure possible current impairment on the job, not what you did last week,” he said.

Workers who test positive under the policy cannot return to work until a doctor who specializes in substance abuse issues is satisfied the worker can return to the job site safely. The worker must also agree to continue any required treatment or counseling, and would also be subject to follow-up testing for two years.

The policy has been ratified by the employers and all building trade unions and was signed on May 21, and is now in the process of being implemented in the industry.

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Editors: To view the complete text of the policy, you can download it from clra-bc.com or from constructionbargaining.ca

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