

Colorado Publishes Guide to OHS Programs for the Legal Marijuana Industry



Although the use of so-called medical marijuana is legal in Canada, recreational pot use is still banned but that's about to change. In the spring of 2017, the federal government will propose to Parliament a new framework for the legalization of marijuana.

When recreational marijuana use does become legal in Canada, a marijuana industry will likely develop. And as the state of Colorado has learned, this industry will face certain health and safety challenges.

With a booming legal marijuana industry, Colorado recently released a guide intended to help assist employers in this industry develop and implement OHS programs. Depending on their specific job, workers in this industry face many of the health and safety hazards that workers in other industries face, such as exposure to hazardous substances, slips, trips and falls, and ergonomics-related hazards. But there are a few hazards that are unique to or heightened in the marijuana industry.

For example, marijuana production requires increased levels of humidity, which have been found to be as high as 70%. This increased humidity in the presence of organic material promotes the growth of mould, which can impact workers' health and cause respiratory issues. (Learn about your duty to protect workers from mould under the OHS laws.)

In addition, workers can be exposed to hazardous ultraviolet (UV) radiation from several sources. Metal halide lights, which are often used in veg rooms, contain an inner arc tube that emits intense UV radiation along with visible light. If the outer bulb is broken, UV levels can be significant enough to cause photokeratitis, a painful eye condition.

Marijuana grow operations may also use UV lamps as germicidal tools. Exposure to UV radiation from these lamps can cause extreme discomfort and serious injury to the eyes and skin. (Take these 7 steps to protect your workers from radiation.)

Lastly, workplace violence is a heightened risk in facilities that sell marijuana due to the high amounts of cash and product on site, which make them prime targets for robberies. (Make sure your workplace violence measures address

violence by non-employees, such as clients, criminals and other outsiders.)