



Fort Bend County Podcasts

Podcast Episode 58 – THC in the Workplace

April 16, 2026

****Disclaimer****-Please note, anything that is said in the podcast does not supersede actual plan or program languages, and anyone wishing for specific information in regard to coverage should go directly to the plan documents found under risk management on eConnect.

Gina: Welcome to this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. I'm Gina.

Wendy: And I'm Wendy. Today, we're bringing back Marti Montoya with All One Health to discuss THC in the workplace.

Gina: Welcome back, Marti.

Marti: Thank you. It's great to be here.

Wendy: I've got a couple of facts, but they're not fun facts. They're actually facts from the CDC.

Gina: Okay.

Wendy: And cannabis is the most commonly used drug that is illegal at the federal level in the United States. And the other one is, after alcohol, cannabis is the substance most often associated with impaired driving. So, Marti, let's get into some questions. What are some signs that signal when someone is impaired on THC? What can someone look for?

Marti: Well, once somebody ingests or inhales THC, they're gonna have a number of responses that some of them can be identified just by looking. Eyes looking glassy and bloodshot, you know, maybe a little bit squinted. The smell of marijuana on that person, especially if they've smoked, that tends to hang around a little bit. So you can also use your sense of smell to try to identify that change in their personality from when they aren't under the influence of marijuana. So they could be giggly. They could also be kind of spacey and detached. You know, it kind of can cause a mental fog or slower thinking.

Wendy: How about those that have desk jobs? How are they affected by THC?

Marti: So THC affects the brain the same way for everyone. The job risk depends on what the person's responsible for. So at a desk, impairment causes mistakes, basically. Whereas like what we were just saying in the field, it causes injuries. So because we know THC impairs our cognition, our attention time, reaction time, coordination, and judgment, those impairments do matter even for the desk job. So their concentration will be impacted, cannot sustain attention as well. Working memory is impacted. So that can cause more work, having to look back and forth to things that you're working on, ability to organize your thoughts and your tasks, and the process that you're gonna use in your tasks.

Marti: So if you're already struggling with something like maybe ADHD that affects our executive functioning, using THC will make that more difficult to use our executive functioning more. And that's



Fort Bend County Podcasts

the part of our brain that makes decisions, problem solves, things like that. It can also impact decision-making and our communication with other colleagues and coworkers. So it's just going to lead to slower thinking and mental fog, reduced accuracy on the task that you're doing, poor information recall, and kind of difficulty following in meetings, following the topic, or multitasking.

Marti: So also there's errors in documentation or data entry. So if it's like a really kind of a tedious or kind of data entry-only job, it can still have an impact even though someone might believe that, oh, I don't have to be clever to do this or use, you know, a lot of brainpower. And so all of those things can be directly impacted. So the performance and reliability of our work goes down.

Marti: I wanted to bring into this talk a little bit about a specific case study that relates to office and admin work. So there was an employee who, and I'm gonna keep this, you know, without naming names or anything that's identifiable. But this employee was reported by other coworkers that they had this vape device that had, like, was admitting a certain type of odor, and they shared that, like, during the lunch break, they would smell that in the restroom.

Marti: So this employee had to go visit HR, and they did admit to using a THC vape, just during lunch breaks, and they said that it was to help manage their anxiety and didn't believe that it was harmful, or she thought she was being really discreet. But the problem was not just that, you know, other coworkers were disrupted and upset about this, but also for her own work. And she was actually a customer support specialist, so she was on the phone a lot. And they had noted a couple of times before this event happened that there were some mistakes, that she had put the wrong person coordinated with the wrong call number. Not a grave mistake, but still a little oversight.

Marti: So I wanted to bring that up as an example of where you might see some issues with cannabis use around the workplace. And even though it is an office job and maybe not considered to be safety sensitive, it's disruptive to other employees who were aware of what was going on. And I also wanna point out that this employee did not feel like it was a problem. And when people are using THC, for example, to manage some sort of symptom, like in this case, anxiety, typically, they're not gonna get the results that they're looking for, and it can become a dependency. So I think I've said this before where three out of ten users can develop something called "cannabis use disorder." And this is an example of someone who was struggling with that after they had been sent to the EAP for assessment and support.

Marti: You know, the policies and the expectations were clarified. They were given a disciplinary warning. But through the process of EAP and the assessment, it was recognized that this person, one, was having trouble managing their use. So they were starting to become more dependent. They had tried to manage their use, but they were not successful doing that. The tolerance level for this individual had been increasing through time when they first started using, which had been, like, three years prior. And even though they believed that it was something that was supportive to them, with anxiety of, you know, dealing with upset customers, things like that, it actually was a very maladaptive coping system that they had come up with.



Fort Bend County Podcasts

Marti: So they did get to have short-term counseling, and they were then suggested to talk to their medical provider for anxiety evaluation and see if there was a, you know, more productive way to deal with that anxiety. And through the short-term counseling, of course, they also received some strategies and coping mechanisms that would help them deal with that anxiety in the moment. So in a way, that was too bad that she got caught. Of course, it was difficult for her, but it led to some really positive outcomes for this individual.

Wendy: And those working out in the field, how does it affect their driving, mood, etcetera? How would they react?

Marti: So cannabis use definitely has an impact on occupational safety. So in the field, employees' reaction time, their balance, their spatial awareness, and their motor planning are all negatively impacted. Of course, this can lead to accidents or falls or maybe not using their equipment or tools properly. It can also impact, like, how they respond quickly to hazards. So reaction time again is less when under the influence of marijuana. Some other environmental demands in the field sort of work; they're usually safety sensitive. You don't want to put people more at risk, including the public or employees or other coworkers, at risk for physical injury that can really endanger others. And also there is potential for violating regulations for either DOT or OSHA regulated environments. So all those are risks that happen when using marijuana during work times.

Marti: This example is from manufacturing. This was a gentleman who operated a forklift. The policy there at that workplace was zero tolerance during the workdays. So, this individual had been working there for six years doing satisfactory performance but had been exhibiting and the supervisor had seen after the fact that, yeah, they had a little bit of coordination problem. They had a little bit of slower reaction time. So, but what happened in this case that brought this to the attention of HR is that a coworker actually smelled something that smelled like THC in their little workplace. So they have a little desk area where they would do some of the desk work and then go out and do the forklift work. And so when, and that caused the drug test.

Marti: So there wasn't a major incident, except for he did actually strike a storage rack with the forklift. Not a lot not property damage or anything like that and no injuries, but because of what the one coworker had reported and then having to do a post-incident drug test, that's where it came up positive for THC, which was even above the acceptable threshold. So when this individual went to HR, they had to discuss the use of THC or cannabis. And he admitted that he does it every evening to help with stress reduction and to help with sleep. That's something that people often think will not affect their role during the day if they're doing it the night before, but I think it's as we've talked about before in another podcast and how it does stay in the system for twenty-four and more hours, sometimes weeks.

Marti: So, this individual was also sent to the EAP and was given some really good tools to help him deal with the stress and to work with his health care provider to talk about the sleep issues. Now part of what also came to light through the EAP assessment is that he also had cannabis use disorder. And this is often a disorder that people think that they can manage. But when you really start asking what, you



Fort Bend County Podcasts

know, around the criteria that's in the diagnostic manual, we find that the cannabis use has increased over time, so their tolerance had been impacted. And they had this, like, persistent desire to use, and yet trying to control it was not successful, and they spent a great deal of time trying to obtain cannabis. So if they've run out, for instance, a lot of, you know, worry would come about and they'd have to go through the process of trying to find it to, you know, be able to continue using.

Marti: So, there's a few other criteria, but if anyone is struggling with controlling their use, that's usually a cue. And, of course, I've talked about in the last podcast about Marijuana Anonymous, which is a 12-step program, and it's an excellent way to start addressing any problems with cannabis use because it seems like most people who end up using it on a regular basis don't consider it a problem. They feel like they can control the use or hide it enough to where they can, you know, get away with it and that they don't feel that they're being impacted. But that's not necessarily true. And even if someone does seem to manage the, regular use, they can't thrive.

Marti: So another couple of cases that I've worked with have been people who use regularly, but they have motivation problems. They're not thriving. And so even if THC is seen as a medicine, like many people, you know, characterize it that way, there are losses in they come in many different forms. And so, it can be performance, of course, but also just life, you know, your ability to fulfill whatever you have to fulfill in life or really thrive in life. So I just wanted to get that out there because I know that many users believe that it's okay for them to use, but it does end up being quite harmful.

Wendy: Well, thank you, Marti, for joining us today.

Marti: Yeah. It was my pleasure. Thank you for inviting me.

Gina: Yes. We always appreciate all your information that you provide, Marti. Thank you. Well, that's a wrap for this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. I'm Gina.

Wendy: And I'm Wendy. So listen for our next podcast.

Gina: And remember, the Benefit Detectives are here to help.