Workplace impairment: a practical guide for supervisors

Simon Fraser University is committed to providing a healthy and safe learning, teaching, research and work environment for all members of the university community. This resource will help you understand your responsibilities as a supervisor regarding workplace impairment and help you recognize and respond to an employee who may be impaired.

Supervisor means any person who instructs, directs and controls employees in the performance of their duties. As a supervisor, you are responsible for:

- Ensuring the health and safety of employees you supervise.
- Identifying and documenting any incidence of suspected impairment or situation where there are concerns about an employee’s ability to perform their job safely. This is particularly important for workers performing duties where impairment can result in serious injury, for example, operating machinery, vehicles, or equipment; working with hazardous materials or in hazardous conditions; having responsibility for matters of life/death or being required to respond to human or operational emergencies.
- Not assigning impaired employees to activities where impairment may endanger themselves or others and taking action which may include not permitting employees to remain at the workplace while impaired.
- Informing an employee of resources/support and encouraging the employee to seek professional care when they come forward and identify a substance abuse problem or request assistance.

What is impairment?

Impairment means the modification of an individual’s physical or mental function such that the performance, judgement or behaviour of the individual is affected so that they are unable to perform responsibilities and/or assigned duties safely and acceptably.

What causes impairment?

Impairment may be linked to various conditions and/or use of substances, such as:

- Fatigue
- Side effects of medical conditions, medications, or medical treatment
- Traumatic experiences or personal/family crises
- Mental illness
- Use or abuse of alcohol and/or drugs (legal or illegal) such as cannabis, heroin, cocaine, fentanyl, or opioids.

What should you do if you suspect an employee is impaired at work?

- Do not panic but do act.
• For imminent life-threatening situations, call 911, then call Campus Public Safety.

Meet privately

1. Take action as soon as it is safe to do so. Delaying could impact your employee and your team. Remember, it is okay to express your concern.
2. Discreetly remove the employee from the work area and meet in a private space.
3. Include another supervisor as a second observer, whenever feasible.
4. Begin conversations with open-ended questions and concrete observations.
5. A simple “How are you?” or “How have things been for you lately?” can go a long way.
6. Share your concerns by describing the behaviour you have observed — be specific. For example: “I notice that you are responding more slowly than usual, and you are slurring your words.” or “This morning I saw you driving erratically on campus.”
7. Provide an opportunity for the employee to explain the behaviour, but recognize that the employee does not need to disclose the cause of impairment.
8. Document your observations in detail.

If you continue to believe your employee is impaired

1. Advise the employee that you will meet with them the following day (provide minimum 24-hours' notice) and if applicable, advise that they may bring a union/association representative.
2. Contact Human Resources/Faculty Relations (i.e., your HR Business partner, HR Research People Team or FR advisor) for assistance in preparing for the meeting if applicable.
3. Provide alternate duties if your employee is unfit to perform their own work, as per SFU Disability Accommodation policy and procedures. In certain circumstances, the employee may be unfit to remain at work.
4. Do not allow your employee to drive or leave on their own. If they are not well enough to be at work, they may not be well enough to drive home. Arrange for alternate transportation.

Offer support, but maintain firm boundaries

1. Treat your employee respectfully.
2. Express your concern about safety for the individual and others.
3. Expect defensiveness but do not take it personally.
4. If your employee discloses that they suffer from an addiction, encourage them to speak with Wellness & Recovery.
5. Ensure the employee is informed of support services including resources available through the Homewood Health Employee and Family assistance Plan.
6. Maintain the confidentiality of the personal information obtained during the process and refrain from disclosing information except to the extent that is necessary for the purpose of investigating concerns, taking corrective action and protecting the health and safety of employees.

Inform and get support

1. Report the incident to your Supervisor.
2. Contact Human Resources or Faculty Relations for additional support and guidance.
## Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Campus Public Safety (24/7)                                             | 778-782-4500  
www.sfu.ca/emergency                                         |
| Wellness & Recovery                                                     | www.sfu.ca/human-resources/rtw-dm                        |
| Human Resources                                                         | www.sfu.ca/human-resources                               |
| HR Business Partners                                                    | www.sfu.ca/human-resources/BusinessPartnershipsTeam     |
| HR Research People Team                                                 | www.sfu.ca/human-resources/research-employees/Research-People-Team  
postdoc@sfu.ca (for Postdoctoral Fellows)  
rp_info@sfu.ca (for all other research employees)        |
| Faculty Relations                                                       | www.sfu.ca/faculty-relations                             |
| Administrative and Professional Staff Association (APSA)                | apsacentral.ca                                          |
| Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), local 3338                  | cupe3338.ca                                              |
| Poly Party                                                              | cbrock@ibew213.org                                      |
| Simon Fraser University Faculty Association (SFUFA)                    | www.sfu.ca                                             |
| Teaching Support Staff Union (TSSU)                                     | www.tssu.ca                                             |
| Homewood Health Employee and Family Assistance (24/7)                   | www.sfu.ca/human-resources/efap                         |
| GP40 Disability Accommodation in the Workplace                         | www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/general/gp40                |
| BC Alcohol and Drug Info and Referral Service                          | 1-800-663-1441 or 604-660-9382                          |
| SFU Workplace Impairment Guidance                                       | www.sfu.ca/human-resources/rtw-dm                        |

*Adapted from the University of Calgary “Impairment in the workplace: A Leader’s Guide”*