

# Month In Review – British Columbia



## **LAWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Minimum Wage**

Dec 31: British Columbia's piece rate minimum wage for 16 crops increased 2.6%. Employers must post notices on-site stating each crop's piece rate, picking containers size and volume or weight needed to fill them, plus "picking cards" for workers to record the total volume or weight they pick. Vacation pay (4%) is included in all piece rates, except daffodils.

Action Point: Find out [how to avoid common payroll errors](#) when adjusting to minimum wage increases.

### **Privacy**

Jan 14: The British Columbia Privacy Commission issued [new guidance](#) to help public bodies ensure that their uses of artificial intelligence, facial recognition, and other high-tech surveillance systems comply with privacy laws. While designed for the public sector, the guidance can also help private companies implement legally sound practices for deploying body-worn cameras, dash cams, drones, fixed cameras, and other technologies.

Action Point: Find out how to guard against AI legal and liability risks by implementing a legally sound [workplace artificial intelligence use policy](#).

### **Health & Safety**

Dec 16: Comments closed on proposed new [OHS regulations](#) that require employers to implement a comprehensive exposure control plan for combustible dusts that includes, among other things, assessment and management of deflagration, combustion, and ignition hazards.

### **Drugs & Alcohol**

Jan 14: Faced with disappointing results, British Columbia says it won't ask the federal government to renew the *Criminal Code* exemption it secured in 2023 when launching a new pilot program to decriminalize drug use by persons with addictions.

The province affirmed that it still considers addiction a health and not a criminal justice issue and pledged to continue working to make it easier for people to get the help they need to battle it.

**Action Point:** Find out how to implement an effective [fitness for duty policy to control substance abuse](#) at your workplace.

## Drugs & Alcohol

Jan 14: British Columbia expanded its Access Central phone line providing a single point of entry connecting adults with addictions to certified health providers in their region. First launched in Greater Vancouver in 2023, the service is now available in the Fraser Health, Interior Health, and Island Health regions. Access Central will soon go province-wide once the planned new Northern Health region line goes active.

**Action Point:** Drug and alcohol addictions are recognized as disabilities that employers must accommodate but only to the point of undue hardship. Find out [how far employers must go to accommodate an employee's drug addiction](#).

## Workers' Compensation

Feb 28: That's the deadline for the first group of British Columbia employers to submit their actual 2025 payroll numbers and 2026 estimates to WorkSafeBC. For some employers, the reporting deadline is either March 15 or March 31, depending on the last 2 digits of their employer account number.

**Action Point:** Look up the [2026 workers' compensation premium rates](#) in each part of Canada.

## CASES

### Workplace Violence: Second Incident of Death Threat Is Just Cause to Terminate

A sawmill worker let his supervisor know "how easy it would be to kill" someone and proceeded to play a song about suicide that he described as his "new favourite song." Instead of disciplining him, the sawmill attributed the comment to the mental health issue it knew the worker had and put him on leave before allowing him to return, provided that he keep his conduct "appropriate, respectful, and non-threatening" and continue receiving treatment for his condition. So, when the allegedly told a new employee that "I could kill people" in the facility, he got fired. The worker vigorously denied making the comment. After hearing from the witnesses and accused, the BC arbitrator concluded that the worker did make the comment and lied to investigators in denying it. Result: The seriousness of the offence combined with the worker's history, failure to accept responsibility and lack of remorse constituted just cause to terminate [[West Fraser Mills \(100 Mile Lumber\) v United Steelworkers, Local 1-2017](#), 2026 CanLII 578 (BC LA, January 2, 2026)].

**Action Point:** It's not clear why the union didn't claim that the decision to terminate violated the employee's right to reasonable accommodations for his mental issues. Keeping the issue focused on workplace violence clearly worked to the employer's advantage. Find out how to implement a legally sound and effective [Workplace Violence Prevention Game Plan](#) at your site.

## **Health & Safety: Combustible Dusts Mishap Leads to Record \$788,867 OHS Fine**

British Columbia handed out the largest OHS fine reported in Canada in 2025, to a Montreal-based mining company for a smelting incident in which a flame from an enclosed manganese hopper created enough pressure to displace a lid to a nearby platform injuring a worker operating an alloy system. Inspectors determined that alloy station wasn't designed to be used for manganese, a combustible dust. Result: A stop-work order and \$788,867 administrative monetary penalty against the company for failure to ensure its workplace was planned, constructed, used and maintained to protect workers from danger [*Rio Tinto Alcan Inc.*].

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