MARIJUANA ON THE JOBSITE:
CONFUSING, “LEGALITY” AND A POTENTIAL SAFETY PROBLEM

New York and many other states are changing laws regarding possession or use of marijuana, and while it is not allowed on the job, it is still America’s most commonly used illegal drug. Naturally, this is increasing the use of marijuana: In 2013, nearly 20 million Americans aged 12 and above had used marijuana in the previous month, up from 14.4 million in 2007.

"Each election cycle, more states are legalizing medical marijuana and recreational marijuana, while others are decriminalizing it," says LIUNA General Secretary-Treasurer and LHSFNA Labor Co-chairman Armand E. Sabitoni. "Monitoring this rapidly changing issue and educating LIUNA members about what these laws mean for them in regard to their careers continues to be of the utmost importance."

In other words, it’s complicated.

New York State has legalized medical marijuana only; but what does that mean?

Medical marijuana is the use of cannabis and its constituent cannabinoids (such as THC and CBD) as medical therapy to treat disease or alleviate symptoms. New York law specifically allows using extracts of these materials rather than smoking them, as in recreational use.

However, these changes are happening at state level, and marijuana remains illegal under federal law. This means that any workplace that receives federal funding, or is subject to federal regulations requiring the testing of safety-sensitive workers, can test workers for drug use; and they must consider marijuana a prohibited substance under the Drug-Free Workplace of 1988.

If that sounds complicated, we can simplify it all to just this: A drug-free workplace is a safer workplace. And employers should adopt and clearly explain their policies on drug use on the job site.

While marijuana use may not be precisely measurable as alcohol use is with blood alcohol content, marijuana use can contribute to workplace problems including workplace accidents and injuries, absenteeism, inattention and inefficiency and job turnover.

The best and safest course is to work drug free in a drug-free workplace.
PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION:

North America has nearly 44 percent of the world’s natural gas pipelines, reports Pipeline & Gas Journal; also nearly half of all petroleum product pipelines and 37 percent of all crude oil pipelines. The LIUNA local union and District Council training funds offer extensive, in-depth Pipeline Courses teaching participants the safety procedures and work practices required to work on pipeline construction projects. This comprehensive training course addresses all phases of pipeline construction, including the front-end work, pipe handling, pipe coating, and back-end work.

“Distribution of oil and gas through pipelines is one of North America’s most critical transportation systems,” says LIUNA General President Terry O’Sullivan. And it’s growing, offering opportunities to our members. Oil and Gas Journal predicts increasing demand for pipelines in all three categories.

This fast-paced construction sector also involves specific hazards for workers and requires close attention to safety. The Interstate Natural Gas Association (INGAA) offers clear guidelines for equipment and procedures.

Basic minimum personal protective equipment for pipeline construction includes:

- ✓ Hard hat
- ✓ Safety glasses with rigid side shields
- ✓ Safety boots with steel toes and shanks
- ✓ Gloves appropriate to the exposure presented
- ✓ Long pants and shirts with sleeves over the shoulders, and
- ✓ High visibility vest
OPPORTUNITY AND HAZARD

Starting with the pipe itself, which is heavy, lengthy and moved by large power equipment, the materials in pipeline work present specific hazards.

- Pipe may roll while being unloaded or stored. Carefully maintaining uniform standards in skid cradles and crotches can protect workers.
- Pinch points such as hook slings can trap and injure workers, particularly hands. Also, avoid placing yourself, or any part, between pipes being moved, and avoid getting between trench walls and the pipe or between pipe joints.
- Excavating trenches presents familiar hazards, but two special safety protocols protect pipeline excavators.
- Hazard assessments before each shift or whenever a task begins or changes, or when new soil conditions occur—such as rain—can prepare crews to work safely in trenches.
- Moreover, every worker on such projects should have “Stop Work” authority on detecting any new hazard.
- To prevent cave-ins, sloping, benching or shoring is required in any excavation of five feet or deeper.
- To protect workers from loose rock or soil falling in from trench faces, use scaling to remove loose material and/or barricades to stop and contain it.
- Use guardrails or barricades to mark work areas.
- Don’t drive vehicles within 10 feet of trench edges.
- Don’t store propane or compressed gas in trenches.
- Prevent flooding of surface water into trenches, and measure for oxygen deficiencies, flammable gasses, liquids or other hazards in trenches.
- Provide means of escape egress every 25 feet on both sides of the trench if pipe or other obstructions block stepping over.
- Position spoil piles far enough from trench edges to allow walking paths on both sides and to prevent wall collapses or falling object hazards from rocks or hard clay.

Finally, and maybe most important, ensure training and re-training for workers exposed to the special hazards of pipeline work.
IT’S YOUR VERY FIRST DAY ON A CONSTRUCTION JOB-SITE: HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT YOU’LL STAY SAFE TO COME BACK TOMORROW?

Of course, you’ve had safety training as an apprentice; but now you have to put all that training into practical use.

1. **Ensure you’re wearing proper safety gear.** Some gear is generic, automatic: your hard-hat, eye protection, steel-reinforced boots, long sleeves. Other items will vary from job-site to job site: haz-mat suits, respirators and ear protection, for example. Match your protective gear to hazards on the job.

2. **Be careful not to take hazards home with you,** be cautious about making sure your boot and clothing are as clean as possible before leaving the work site.

3. **Know where a first-aid kit is located at all times.** And—as with safety wear—be sure to locate other job-site-specific safety facilities including eyewash stations and shower equipment.

4. **Always work within your training.** No responsible supervisor will ask you to work on equipment or with materials you’re not trained to use; and don’t volunteer to do so.

5. **Be site-specific safe.** Inspect your work area, taking note of both potential hazards and safeguards in place for your protection, including fencing, signage, and personal protective equipment.

6. **Everybody on the job site wants to see you back** there tomorrow, safe and ready to work. So, ask their advice and help in safety matters.

The best and safest way to get back to the job-site on day two—and throughout your carer—is to ensure you’re safe right from Day One.