



Industrial Hemp

What is industrial hemp?

Industrial Hemp is a tall, leafy plant with a strong fibrous stalk. Although Industrial Hemp varieties are members of the *Cannabis* plant family, they contain very low levels of the psychoactive ingredient THC (delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol).

Is industrial hemp the same as marihuana?

Both industrial hemp and marihuana come from the same plant family, *Cannabis*, but there is a difference between industrial hemp and marihuana. Industrial hemp plants contain 0.3% THC or less in their leaves and flowering parts. Products made from industrial hemp grain have very little THC and therefore have no psychoactive or intoxicating effect when consumed.

Why has hemp been illegal to cultivate in Canada in the past?

Hemp production was prohibited in Canada in 1938 under the *Opium and Narcotic Drug Act* as part of a combined international battle against the abuse of THC and other controlled substances. Although the prohibition was relaxed briefly during World War II when traditional sources of fibres were unavailable, the prohibition was renewed after the war. Since 1961 Health Canada has allowed limited production in Canada for scientific research purposes.

Why has the government changed its laws to allow the growing of hemp?

In recent years, interest in the cultivation of industrial hemp, as a potential source of new jobs, has grown in the agricultural and industrial sectors, as has the need for the development of alternative sources of fibre. In addition, the information gathered as a result of the issuance of research licences over the past four years has indicated that industrial hemp could be successfully grown in Canada as a separate entity from *Cannabis* (marihuana). With such a demand and the encouraging research findings, Health Canada chose to give the agricultural and industrial sectors the opportunity to build what is essentially a new industry by changing the laws restricting the cultivation of industrial hemp.

What is the Industrial Hemp Program?

The Industrial Hemp Program permits Canadian farmers to grow *Cannabis* for industrial use, under controlled circumstances. This Program administers the regulatory approval process for the commercial production of industrial hemp. It is comprised of a system of licences, permits and authorizations for all persons in Canada engaged in the cultivation, distribution, importation, exportation, and processing of industrial hemp.

When did the Industrial Hemp Program come into effect?

The Program came into effect on March 12, 1998 when the new *Industrial Hemp Regulations* came into force.

When was the first licence issued to permit the growth of industrial hemp for commercial purposes?

Although the growth of industrial hemp crops has been previously permitted for scientific research purposes, the first licence to grow industrial hemp for commercial purposes was issued on May 8, 1998.

Why are there so many different kinds of licences?

The licensing approach was developed to ensure that cultivation, product development and marketing do not afford opportunities for crop substitution or illegal diversion. The multiple licensing approach is adapted to the diversity existing within the industry. A one page application form combined with appropriate schedules for each planned activity will cover most situations.

For how long are licences and permits valid?

Licences are issued on a calendar year basis and expire on the December 31st immediately following the issuance of the licence or authorization, unless otherwise specified. Permits are valid for a period of three months. Licence holders must reapply each year providing information that is current at the time of application. The Office of Controlled Substances, Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety Branch (HECS) will accept applications as early as mid-November for licensing in the following year to ensure that persons requiring a licence or authorization for carry-over material have an opportunity to obtain the necessary documents.

What are the potential uses of industrial hemp?

Fibre from the stalks can be used in making paper, textiles, rope/twine and construction materials. Grain from industrial hemp can be used in food products, cosmetics, plastics and fuel.

What are the potential benefits of permitting the growth of industrial hemp for commercial purposes in Canada?

The cultivation of industrial hemp as an alternative crop may have a positive economic impact in many sectors. For example, the development of this industry may result in job creation, especially in rural areas and small communities. As well, industrial hemp may augment the materials available to some existing industries where current materials are scarce or less sustainable.

Is it easy to grow?

In other countries, industrial hemp has proven to be a hardy, fast growing, resilient and high yield crop. In Canada, industrial hemp has shown good potential as an alternative to be included in rotation with other, more traditional crops. Its short growth period of 85-120 days makes it well suited for cultivation in many parts of Canada. If planted at the proper time, it reportedly suppresses most weeds. Insect and disease problems must be managed like any other crop.

How will Health Canada monitor the growing of industrial hemp to ensure that no illegal activities are occurring?

The licensing approach combined with compliance monitoring programs was developed to minimize opportunities for crop substitution or illegal diversion. Only seeds of approved industrial hemp varieties, which have a THC level lower than 0.3% in their leaves and flowering heads, can be planted. Growers are required to geographically identify the specific location of their fields, the pedigree of their seeds and must maintain records of production and distribution. In addition, growers are subject to inspections at any time by HECS, or other inspectors who enforce the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* and its Regulations.

What happens if a person does not comply with all the regulatory requirements?

Persons failing to comply with the regulatory requirements within the *Regulations* could have their licence, authorization or permit revoked, or be refused future licences. In addition, if the person is in illegal possession of *Cannabis* products, they will be subject to prosecution under the Criminal code and penalties defined within the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*.

**For more information or to
obtain a licence application
form**

Write:

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Office of Controlled Substances
Bureau des substances contrôlées

Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety Branch
Direction générale, Santé environnementale et sécurité
des consommateurs