

DID YOU KNOW???

MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION SYNONYMOUS WITH INCREASED CRASHES IN COLORADO

Legal recreational marijuana in Colorado began with adult use in late 2012 and was followed by legal sales in 2014. Even though the number of drivers involved in fatal crashes in Colorado who tested positive for marijuana has risen sharply each year since 2013, more than doubling in that time, Colorado transportation and public safety officials say the rising number of pot-related traffic fatalities cannot be definitively linked to legalized marijuana.

A Denver Post analysis of the data and coroner reports provides the most comprehensive look yet into whether roads in Colorado have become more dangerous since the drug's legalization. Increasingly potent levels of marijuana were found in positive-testing drivers who died in crashes in Front Range counties, according to coroner data since 2013 compiled by The Denver Post. Nearly a dozen in 2016 had levels five times the amount allowed by law, and one was at 22 times the limit. Levels were not as elevated in earlier years.

Let's take a look at some Colorado crash statistics. The 2013-16 period saw a 40 percent increase in the number of all drivers involved in fatal crashes in Colorado, from 627 to 880, according to the NHTSA data. Those who tested positive for alcohol in fatal crashes from 2013 to 2015 (figures for 2016 were not available) grew 17 percent, from 129 to 151. By contrast, the number of drivers who tested positive for marijuana use jumped 145 percent - from 47 in 2013 to 115 in 2016. During that time, the prevalence of testing drivers for marijuana use did not change appreciably, federal fatal-crash data show.

Among The Post's other findings:

- Marijuana is figuring into more fatal crashes overall. In 2013, drivers tested positive for the drug in about 10 percent of all fatal crashes. By 2016, it was 20 percent.
- More drivers are testing positive for marijuana and nothing else. Of the drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2014 who tested positive for cannabinoids, more than 52 percent had no alcohol in their system. By 2016, it had grown to 69 percent.
- The average age of drivers in deadly crashes in 2015 who tested positive for marijuana was nearly 35, with a quarter of them over 40.
- In 2016, of the 115 drivers in fatal wrecks who tested positive for marijuana use, 71 were found to have Delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, in their blood, indicating use within hours, according to state data. Of those, 63 percent were over 5 nanograms per milliliter, the state's limit for driving.

So, as other states consider legalizing marijuana use, can we learn lessons from Colorado, a state with experience? "I never understood how we'd pass a law without first understanding the impact better," said Barbara Deckert, whose fiancé, Ron Edwards, was killed in a 2015 collision with a driver who tested positive for marijuana use below the

legal limit and charged only with careless driving. “How do we let that happen without having our ducks in a row?” Good question!

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