



NEWS

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New study released coincides with Labor Day impaired driving crackdown, reveals marijuana-impaired driving more dangerous in states where the drug is more permissive

New advertising campaign to raise awareness of the problem

For Immediate Release

St. Petersburg, FL – Wednesday, August 30, 2023 - A [new study published by Drug Free](#)

[America Foundation](#) has revealed troubling results. In states that have legalized high-THC marijuana—either medically or recreationally—the frequency of marijuana-impaired driving is 32 percent higher than in states that haven't. The study suggests that the loosened marijuana policies in the 18 less restrictive states resulted in a million more cases of marijuana-impaired driving.

The study is being released as law enforcement throughout the country are participating in the *If You Feel Different, You Drive Different. Drive High, Get a DUI.* high-visibility enforcement period. The enforcement effort, coordinated through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, extends through the Labor Day holiday weekend.

In the study, the 50 states were divided into two groups, representing: (1) less permissive states that have only acted on decriminalizing marijuana use or implemented low-THC medicinal programs, and (2) more permissive states with high-THC medicinal programs and full recreational marijuana programs. In 2017, eight states had adopted full recreational marijuana programs (Alaska, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington) and ten states had enacted higher-THC medicinal programs (Connecticut,

Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Vermont). Incidentally, seven of these states have since adopted full recreational programs.

Adding to the concern is the fact that fatalities in the U.S. from marijuana-impaired drivers have risen dramatically between 2000 and 2018, rising from 9 percent of all fatal crashes to 21.5 percent.

“The loosening of marijuana restrictions in states that have legalized the drug has introduced a more permissive culture. At the same time, little effort has been made to address the potential risks of marijuana-impaired driving,” according to Amy Ronshausen, executive director of Drug Free America Foundation. “Americans are clearly responding to the policy enactment of marijuana programs, with self-reported past-year marijuana use skyrocketing from 10.4 percent in 2002 to 19.3 percent in 2021,” she added.

Simultaneously, marijuana potency has also grown exponentially, from the “Woodstock Weed” that contained THC levels of 1-3 percent to the modern commercial marijuana that averages THC levels of between 19.2 and 21.5 percent. “The loosening of marijuana restrictions through state policy changes has introduced cultural changes in marijuana use perceptions, while little effort has been placed in reinforcing the potential risks marijuana-impaired driving places on traffic safety,” Ronshausen said.

“Making matters worse, the challenge of detecting and enforcing marijuana-impaired driving laws remains an imperfect science. For example, most traditional blood alcohol or field sobriety tests are ineffective and inadmissible in court,” she continued.

It is critical that these results impact future policy debates, especially since enforcement data shows that between 11 to 23 percent of recreational marijuana sold ends up in the hands of minors. On top of that, consumption lounges, now legal in seven states (Nevada, New Jersey, New York, New Mexico, Illinois, Colorado, and California), and drive-up pot shops will keep spurring increased occurrences of marijuana intoxication and driving.

“To further amplify the results of this study and the need for action, Drug Free America Foundation has released [a long form video detailing the dangers of marijuana-impaired driving](#). Additionally, three 15-second videos designed to educate decisionmakers and motorists on the issue will be promoted through a cross-platform digital marketing campaign in targeted media markets throughout the United States,” Ronshausen concluded.

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