

DRUG USE IS UP Is the Legalization and Commercialization of Marijuana To Blame?

Look Inside for Details

By David G. Evans, Esq.

Partnership for a
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DRUGS
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There is bad news for employers who strive for drug free workplaces. The annual Quest Diagnostics Drug Testing Index (DTI) shows that the positive drug test rates for almost 6,600,000 urine drug tests in the U.S. workforce increased by 9.3 % in 2014 compared to 2013. ^[FN1] The year 2013 was the first year in ten years in which the overall positive rate for urine drug tests increased. Prior to 2013, positive results went down nearly every year for over 24 years. ^[FN2]

According to Quest, marijuana is the drug most commonly detected. Positive testing rates for marijuana had a big jump of a 14.3 % increase. In safety-sensitive workplaces marijuana rates increased 6%. This increase in the marijuana use rates is consistent with findings from other data sources, such as the National Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

This is now a trend. This data shows a potential reversal of the decades' long decrease in the abuse of illicit drugs in our national workforce. Marijuana and other dangerous drugs are making a comeback. This rise is attributed to "medical" marijuana and marijuana legalization. ^[FN3]

THE LEGALIZATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF MARIJUANA

The legalization and commercialization of marijuana effects not only the states that have legalized recreational and "medical" marijuana but in states that have not. Intense lobbying by the marijuana industry has created a false public perception that marijuana is not harmful. The benchmark surveys of drug use show that when people believe a drug is harmful fewer people use that drug. These surveys show that national perception of harm with respect to marijuana has dropped off since the drive to legalize marijuana. ^[FN4]

MARIJUANA USE LEADS TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE DISORDERS

A recent national longitudinal study published in February 2016 in the Journal of the American Medical Association noted that:



Within the general population, cannabis use is associated with an increased risk for several substance use disorders. Physicians and policy makers should take these associations of cannabis use under careful consideration. ^[FN5]

THE HARMS OF MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION

Since marijuana is the most used illicit drug, what are some of the consequences of this increase on workplace productivity, health and safety and on our children? Marijuana use can impair memory, attention, motor skills, reaction time and the integration of complex information. It can cause impaired cognition and cause other neurological damage.^[FN6]



A 2016 report from Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM) documents the impact of three years of marijuana legalization in Colorado and Washington.^[FN7]

1. Colorado now leads the country in past-month marijuana use by youth, with Washington in 6th place. Past-year use rates in both states are far outpacing the national average.
2. Marijuana is now related to a record high of 33% of DUI cases in Washington state.
3. Marijuana poisonings are increased 148% in Colorado since legalization, and up 153% among children up to 5 years old.
4. In 2015, drug crimes rose 12.5% in the city and county of Denver, and homicides were up over 74%.

A 2015 by SAM report revealed that in Colorado and Washington the data of increased drug use and other harms is dramatic.^[FN8]

1. Past-year and part-month marijuana use by all ages exceeded the national average. It has risen significantly since legalization.
2. The incidence of children going to emergency rooms for accidentally ingesting marijuana has more than doubled in Colorado and increased in Washington.
3. Arrests for marijuana use in Denver public schools increased by 6% between 2013 and 2014.
4. Teen admissions to treatment for marijuana use at the Arapahoe House treatment network in Colorado increased by 66% between 2011 and 2014.
5. In 2013, there were 288 highway interdictions resulting in seizures of Colorado marijuana destined to over 40 states. This is an increase of over 397%
6. In the City and County of Denver crimes related to marijuana are up. Drug violations are up 12%. Disorderly conduct is up 51%
7. Marijuana related burns are up in Colorado.
8. In 2013, Denver police issued 184 citations for public display of marijuana. In just the first 9 months of 2014, there have been 668 such citations.
9. In Colorado and Washington driving under the influence of marijuana is up.
10. Buyer's remorse. Of the 31 cities in Colorado that voted to allow the recreational sales of marijuana, 26 have now voted to ban it.

A major study by researchers at Columbia University found that states that legalized marijuana use for medical purposes have significantly higher rates, almost twice as high, of marijuana use and of marijuana abuse and dependence than states without such laws.^[FN9]

Another issue that has risen due to medical marijuana is drugged driving. In California, a state with widely abused "medical" marijuana, drugged driving is more prevalent than drunk driving nowadays.^[FN10]

The rate of marijuana exposures among children under the age of six increased by 147.5% in the United States between 2000 and 2013 according to a study published in Clinical Pediatrics. Even more disturbing in the states that have legalized "medical" marijuana, the rate rose nearly 610% over that time. The data comes from the National Poison Data System. 75% percent of the children were exposed by ingesting edible marijuana products such as marijuana-infused candy. Clinical effects include drowsiness or lethargy, ataxia [failure of muscle coordination], agitation or irritability, confusion and coma, respiratory depression, and single or multiple seizures.^[FN11]

There is a bill in the New Jersey legislature to legalize and thus commercialize marijuana. Does our state want to become another Colorado with increased harms to our workplaces and public safety and harms to our children? Do we want pot stores in our neighborhoods or next door to our workplaces?

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