

Is euphoria of recreational pot clouding our common sense?

By Jim Crittenden & Jeni Mendel 4:30 p.m. March 28, 2014

The euphoria surrounding legalizing pot for recreational use is clouding common sense when it comes to driving. Pot remains the drug of choice for teenagers and research shows that youth are extremely vulnerable to marijuana's ill effects. Young drivers who smoke pot are at particularly high risk for being involved in a vehicle crash, not only due to overall driver inexperience, but also to the increasing availability of pot products with high levels of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol).

In a recent study of 23,500 drivers from six different states including California, drugged driving accounted for more than 28 percent of traffic deaths in 2010, up from more than 16 percent in 1999. Marijuana was the primary drug involved in the increase. It is important to note that five out of the six states surveyed have medical marijuana policies in place.

In a recent National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, youth ages 16 and younger who reported using multiple substances including alcohol, tobacco and marijuana were associated with higher rates of substance use dependence as an adult. Early users of all three substances were more than twice as likely to meet the criteria for marijuana dependence. Past 30-day use of marijuana by teens 12 to 17 is highest in medical-marijuana states, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration State Estimates from 2009-2010.

In Washington state, drivers testing positive for marijuana increased significantly since legalization took place in January 2013. Within the first six months, 745 drivers stopped by police tested positive for THC in their blood. In prior years, 1,000 drivers tested positive for THC on an annual basis according to the Washington State Patrol.

Also affecting health and safety that no one talks about is the ever-increasing potency of today's genetically modified pot, which, by conservative estimates, is nearly five times stronger than it was 30 years ago, according to the University of Mississippi Potency Monitoring Project, 2009.

Steps need to be taken now to ensure our youth are educated regarding the hazardous effects of driving "high," such as adding or enhancing drugged driving language to prevention campaigns and school based driving programs, as well as increased resources for law enforcement including effective drug detection equipment

Intoxication poses a threat whether it is THC or alcohol, by allowing yet another mind altering substance to enter our roadways legally, and using the term "recreational" sends a dangerous message to our youth that the risks are minimal, perhaps even insignificant. There have been hard lessons learned over the decades from the thousands of alcohol related crashes on our roadways that should serve as a warning that perhaps one legal intoxicant is enough!

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