

Medical Marihuana Involved in CA Fatal Crashes

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Abstract

In the Medical Marihuana state of CA, marihuana was found in drivers which resulted in 1,551 fatalities in the last 5 years. Nationally, in the 23 states and D.C. with state-approved Medical Marihuana, there were more than 1,000 fatalities in the single year of 2014. In the 27 states with no legal marihuana of any kind there were 1,619 marihuana related fatalities.

If CA marihuana use increases from the 2014 level of 18.8% to the level of WA and AK (two recreational marihuana states) at 31%, we could expect an additional 223 CA fatalities each year, for about 565 fatalities a year.

Alcohol is also heavily involved in the marihuana fatalities with 46% of the marihuana drivers were also impaired by alcohol at 0.05% and 38% legally DUI at 0.08+ BAC.

Despite the heavy use of alcohol by marihuana drivers, alcohol involvement in fatal crashes has increased less than 1% in the last 5 years.

Drivers with marihuana in Medical Marihuana states had a 29% higher involvement in fatal crashes than No Medical Marihuana states. Every percent increase in CA driver marihuana involvement in crashes will results in 19 more fatalities.

The growing legalization of marihuana for recreational use, along with the present Medical Marihuana use will cause a tidal wave of motor vehicle fatalities and injuries. This has already happened in Washington State where the level of drivers with marihuana is almost equal to the level of drivers DUI, the No.1 preventable traffic safety problem.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| CA Fatalities for Marihuana Involved drivers | 1 |
| Alcohol Involved in Marihuana Driver Fatal Crashes | 2 |
| Increased Marihuana Involvement not Increasing Alcohol Involvement | 2 |
| Medical Marihuana states vs. NO Marihuana States | 3 |
| 19 Fatalities per 1% increased Marihuana involvement | 4 |
| Summary | 4 |

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CA Fatalities for Marihuana Involved drivers

Marihuana is found in CA fatal crashes with **1,500 killed in the last 5 years**. Since 1996, marihuana is only available legally in CA as Medical Marihuana. Government data suggests the number of deaths is under reported since less than half of drivers involved in fatalities are tested for marihuana and other drugs. The actual number is probably much higher than 1,500 since less than 1/2 (43.2%) of the drivers in fatal crashes were tested in the five year period.

In 2014, 19% of the drivers used marihuana compared to only 12% in 2010, **up 52% in 5 years**. Also note the large increase in marihuana fatalities in CO and WA the first full year following recreational sales.

| Table 1. Drivers in Fatal Crashes with Marihuana in Blood, 2010 to 2014, | | | | | | |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------------------|
| NHTSA FARS Data | | | | | | |
| Group | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2010 – 14 (5 yrs) |
| CA Fatalities, Driver w Mj * | 227 | 254 | 336 | 385 | 349 | 1551 |
| WA Fatalities, Driver Mj | 94 | 61 | 64 | 69** | 109** | 397 |
| CO Fatalities, Driver Mj | 47 | 60 | 44 | 53** | 71** | 275 |
| CA Driver with Marihuana | 208 | 233 | 301 | 326 | 307 | 1375 |
| CA Drivers Drug Tested | 1689 | 1749 | 1715 | 1786 | 1634 | 8573 |
| Percent Marihuana | 12.30% | 13.30% | 17.60% | 18.30% | 18.80% | 16.00% |
| CA Drivers in Fatal Crashes | 3654 | 3781 | 3965 | 4222 | 4225 | 19,847 |
| % Drug Tested | 46.20% | 46.30% | 43.30% | 42.30% | 38.70% | 43.20% |
| * Mj found in driver's blood. | | | | | | |
| **WA and CO had recreational use legal in 2013 and 2014 (Numbers in RED.) | | | | | | |

Alcohol Involved in Marihuana Driver Fatal Crashes

As shown in Table 2, alcohol is also heavily involved in the marihuana fatalities with about half, (46%) of the marihuana drivers were also impaired by alcohol at 0.05% and more than 1/3 (38%) legally DUI at 0.08+ BAC.

| Table 2. CA Drivers in Fatal Crashes with Marihuana and Alcohol, 2014 FARS Data | | | | | |
|--|----------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Group | All Mj drivers | Mj and DUI (0.08+) | | Mj and Impaired (0.05+) | |
| | Marihuana 2014 | Only mj | Mj with 08+ | Only mj | Mj with 05+ |
| MJ Fatalities | 349 | 217 | 132* | 190 | 159 |
| Percent | 100% | 62.2% | 37.8% | 54.4% | 45.6% |
| Drivers w Marijuana | 307 | 195 | 112 | 179 | 128 |
| Drug Tested | 1634 | 1634 | 1634 | -1634 | 1634 |
| % Marijuana | 18.8% | 11.9% | 6.9% | 11.0% | 7.8% |

*Of the 349 drivers with mj (18.8% of all drivers), 132 (more than 1/3, 37.8%) were also DUI at 08+ BAC. Even more, 45.6% were impaired at 0.05+ BAC.

Increased Marihuana Involvement not Increasing Alcohol Involvement

As evident from Table 1 above, the incidence of CA and WA fatal drivers having marihuana in their blood is increasing every year. This is in contrast to the stable level of alcohol involvement in CA driving fatalities. CA data shows that alcohol involvement in fatal crashes averages about 28% and has increased less than 1% in the last 5 years.

| Table 3. CA Alcohol Related* Fatalities 2010 to 2014, NHTSA FARS Data | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Group | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
| Total Fatalities | 2,720 | 2,816 | 2,966 | 3,107 | 3,074 |
| Alcohol Related (0.08+ BAC) | 774 | 774 | 829 | 883 | 882 |
| % Fatalities Alcohol Related | 28.5% | 27.5% | 28.0% | 28.4% | 28.7% |

* Fatalities in which the driver BAC was 08+ or higher.

Medical Marihuana States vs. NO Legal Marihuana States

Table 4 compares Medical Marihuana and No Legal Marihuana states for percentage of drivers in fatal crashes known to have marihuana in their system. Medical Marihuana states had 29% higher incidence of fatal drivers, with wide state variation.

Nationally, in the 23 states and D.C. with state-approved Medical Marihuana, there were more than 1,000 fatalities in the single year of 2014. In the 27 states with No Legal Marihuana of any kind there were 1,619 fatalities.

| Table 4. Known Percent of Drivers in Fatal Crashes with Marihuana for States with Medical Marihuana vs. States with NO Legal Marihuana, 2014 NHTSA FARS Passenger Vehicle & Light Trucks Data | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|-------------|----------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| Medical Marihuana States | | | | NO Legal Marihuana States | | | |
| State | Total mj | # Drivers | % mj | State | Total mj | # Drivers | % mj |
| Alaska | 18 | 59 | 30.51% | Alabama | 63 | 480 | 13.13% |
| Arizona | 26 | 234 | 11.11% | Arkansas | 75 | 338 | 22.19% |
| California | 233 | 1207 | 19.30% | Florida | 84 | 818 | 10.27% |
| Colorado | 44 | 220 | 20.00% | Georgia | 86 | 508 | 16.93% |
| Connecticut | 11 | 86 | 12.79% | Idaho | 9 | 63 | 14.29% |
| Delaware | 17 | 48 | 35.42% | Indiana | 43 | 368 | 11.68% |
| D.C. | 1 | 12 | 8.33% | Iowa | 16 | 88 | 18.18% |
| Hawaii | 5 | 32 | 15.63% | Kansas | 19 | 166 | 11.45% |
| Illinois | 77 | 596 | 12.92% | Kentucky | 68 | 391 | 17.39% |
| Maine | 2 | 87 | 2.30% | Louisiana | 25 | 291 | 8.59% |
| Maryland | 0 | 157 | No Data | Mississippi | 12 | 198 | 6.06% |
| Massachusetts | 20 | 102 | 19.61% | Missouri | 80 | 309 | 25.89% |
| Michigan | 72 | 383 | 18.80% | Nebraska | 6 | 47 | 12.77% |
| Minnesota | 12 | 143 | 8.39% | North Carolina | 0 | 31 | No Data |
| Montana | 28 | 133 | 21.05% | North Dakota | 3 | 87 | 3.45% |
| Nevada | 24 | 158 | 15.19% | Ohio | 82 | 510 | 16.08% |
| New Hampshire | 14 | 75 | 18.67% | Oklahoma | 20 | 237 | 8.44% |
| New Jersey | 38 | 279 | 13.62% | Pennsylvania | 53 | 669 | 7.92% |
| New Mexico | 15 | 101 | 14.85% | South Carolina | 75 | 361 | 20.78% |
| New York | 52 | 366 | 14.21% | South Dakota | 3 | 63 | 4.76% |
| Oregon | 18 | 83 | 21.69% | Tennessee | 72 | 510 | 14.12% |
| Rhode Island | 4 | 19 | 21.05% | Texas | 151 | 986 | 15.31% |
| Vermont | 6 | 23 | 26.09% | Utah | 17 | 150 | 11.33% |
| Washington | 81 | 262 | 30.92% | Virginia | 34 | 288 | 11.81% |
| Total | 839 | 4708 | 17.82% | West Virginia | 16 | 142 | 11.27% |
| Med mj states 28.5% higher USA Total 15.3%, about 1/2 of DUI level of 31% | | | | Wisconsin | 49 | 313 | 15.65% |
| | | | | Wyoming | 11 | 71 | 15.49% |
| | | | | Total | 1172 | 8452 | 13.87% |

States in **RED** are higher than their group average. **WA, CO** have legal sale for recreational use in 2014.

19 Fatalities per 1% Increased Marihuana involvement

Using 2014 California data from Table 1, **every percent increase** in driver marihuana involvement in fatalities **results in 19 more fatalities** (349 fatalities /18.8% marihuana drivers =18.6 fatalities per 1 % marihuana drivers). A 10% increase would kill about 190 more persons. If CA marihuana use increases to the level of WA and AK at 31% (Table 4), we could expect an additional 223 fatalities, for a total of 565 fatalities a year. Up from the 349 in 2014.

The probable ballot initiative for recreational use of marihuana in CA increases the importance of the 19 fatalities per 1% increase in Marihuana drivers.

Summary

Ever since 2006, marihuana has been the leading drug, after alcohol, found in US driving fatalities. Currently, there are 23 states and D.C. that have some form of legalized marihuana sales allowance despite the Controlled Substance Act of 1970 stipulating that marihuana is a highly addictive substance with no medical indication. Many states avoid the legal issue of having physicians prescribe marihuana for medical purposes by instead allowing them to “recommend” marihuana.

Four states (AK, CO, OR, WA) and D.C. will have recreational use approved in 2016. Most states have non-medical personnel providing marihuana without complete proper warnings, including not operating heavy machinery or automobiles following use, attached to the containers as required by FDA-approved pharmaceuticals. Without proper education and warnings regarding avoiding operating vehicles as required with other prescribed drugs that effect one’s ability to drive, this places the entire public at risk due to the increased prevalence of marihuana and marihuana drivers being on the roadways.

Normally any drug with so many deaths, injuries and associated problems would be seriously reviewed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). However, since medical marihuana is NOT ordered by prescription and under the authority of the FDA, the marihuana industry is thriving and not being held accountable for the damage that is being done.

We believe that the strict laws for prescription drugs including Medical Marihuana must be enforced along with swift law enforcement assessment to protect the safety and security of the American public.

The increased legalization of marihuana for recreational use, along with the increased presence of Medical Marihuana will cause a large increase in the number of motor vehicle fatalities and injuries in the United States. The rate of marihuana involvement in fatal crashes will soon rival alcohol as the No.1 preventable traffic safety problem.

Data: NHTSA FARS encyclopedia: <http://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/Main/index.aspx>