



MARIJUANA - MAJOR CAUSE OF INJURY ACCIDENTS *the leading cause of death for young people.*

By Roger Morgan, Exec Director, Coalition for A Drug-Free California

Marijuana is the illicit drug used most often (70%) by drivers who drove after drug use and is a major factor why motor vehicle crashes are **the leading cause of death for American young people** (NHTSA, 2000)

Marijuana use before driving has seriously impacted the skills necessary to operate a vehicle safely. Roadside alertness is severely diminished as is concentration, motor coordination and the ability to react quickly. Research subjects found it difficult to judge distance and react appropriately to roadside signals and sounds after smoking marijuana.

Studies conducted by the NHTSA and Dutch Ministry of Transport concluded that the effects of THC alone on driving performance were of sufficient magnitude to warrant concern due to the drivers level of impairment and inability to facilitate evasive action if necessary. Further, drivers were also more likely to fall asleep during prolonged vehicle operation. THC and alcohol use in combination creates a serious threat to highway safety. (NHTSA, 1999; NHTSA, 2000)

In all studies referenced above, subjects were given marijuana cigarettes that had between 1.5- 4 % THC. Marijuana today averages 10.4% and goes as high 37%. (Marijuana and Driving: Going to Pot on the Highway by Jim Porter). **Impairment levels today are 2 to 15 times greater than those studied.**

Dr. Robert DuPont of the Institute for Behavior and Health (www.stopdruggeddriving.org) reveals:

- 20% of all motor vehicle accidents are attributable to drugged driving. (50% of seriously injured drivers test positive for drugs. (Walsh JM, Flegel R., et al 2005)
- 8,600 people died in 2005 as a result of drugged driving
- 580,000 people were injured in car crashes as a result of drugged driving
- \$33 billion in damages every year.

Which drug is most prevalent? Marijuana! 26.9% of seriously injured drivers tested positive for marijuana. There are 127 million current users of alcohol in America and, and because of restrictive drug policies, only 15 million smoke marijuana. In spite of this, alcohol was only involved with 15% of injured drivers compared to marijuana at 26.9%. **Per capita, marijuana smokers cause 18 times more injury accidents than alcohol.**

In a roadside survey, of those who tested positive for a drug, 49.4% tested positive for marijuana alone, and another 8.6% tested positive for marijuana and cocaine. In Canada, 10.4% of all drivers tested positive for drugs, with marijuana and cocaine accounting for 4.6% each. The figure of one person in ten driving under the influence holds true in America as well. Scary!

Legalizing marijuana for any reason will adversely impact public safety. More people would die and be injured on the highways, and the cost to insurance companies and the general population would soar. Legalization is simply a dumb idea, put forth by people who like to get high, with no regard for the social consequences of their actions. Alcohol and tobacco, the two legal drugs, inflict enough harm. We neither need nor can we afford one more.