

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR SCIENCE IN DRUG POLICY
IMPACT OF REGULATION ON DRUG CRIME & IMPAIRED DRIVING

WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE ON CANNABIS?

Does regulation increase the number of high drivers?



SUPPORT FOR CLAIM:



SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE:

- Though the risk of accidents increases for high drivers, this doesn't mean regulation leads to more high drivers on the road
- Total traffic fatalities were down in Colorado for 2014 after cannabis regulation compared to 2013, and below the average since 2002
- Regulation allows for public education and awareness campaigns to prevent impaired driving

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WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE ON CANNABIS?

Does drug crime stay the same under regulation?



SUPPORT FOR CLAIM:



SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE:

- Evidence has demonstrated that prohibition has failed to reduce the size of drug markets or the violence associated with them
- Regulation diverts cannabis sale revenue from the criminal market to licit sellers, therefore decreasing criminal profits

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CLAIM	RESPONSE
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“We are going to have a lot more people stoned on the highway and there will be consequences.”
- Rep. John Mica (R-Fla.)
(Balko, 2014)

- While evidence shows that the risk of motor vehicle collisions increases for drivers during acute intoxication from cannabis use (Asbridge, Hayden, & Cartwright, 2012; M. C. Li et al., 2012), evidence does not suggest that cannabis regulation leads to increases in the number of impaired drivers on the road. In the case of Colorado, Washington State, and Uruguay, it is too early to determine what long-term impacts might be.
- However, raw data from the Colorado Department of Transportation found that total traffic fatalities were down in the state for 2014 compared to 2013 and the average since 2002 (Balko, 2014). Of course, such counts may not tell us about the specific role of cannabis use in car crashes. However, they do provide reason to question any general claims that cannabis regulation will necessarily lead to less safety on the road at the population-level.
- This claim seems to be rooted in the assumption that impaired driving will increase because cannabis use will increase under a regulatory scheme. It is therefore worth emphasizing that scientific evidence has not found an association between levels of drug use and national drug policies (Degenhardt et al., 2008).
- It is important to note that responsible regulatory schemes would not legalize driving under the influence of cannabis. It remains an offence in Colorado, and indeed the law has arguably been tightened - with new THC blood limits introduced, increased enforcement efforts, and a public education drive funded in part by cannabis tax revenue (Colorado Department of Transportation, 2015). Importantly, compared to prohibition, cannabis regulation allows for detailed public education and awareness campaigns to prevent risky behaviours, such as impaired driving, as has occurred with drunk driving (Hingson & Winter, 2003).
- Interestingly, experts agree that the risk of motor vehicle collisions is much lower for cannabis use compared to the risk associated with alcohol use. The impact of alcohol intoxication on driving therefore remains a far greater public health concern (Li, Brady, & Chen, 2013).

BOTTOM LINE: While experimental studies suggest that cannabis intoxication reduces motor skills and likely increases the risk of motor vehicle collisions, there is not sufficient data to suggest that cannabis regulation would increase impaired driving, and thereby traffic fatalities.

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