VISION ZERO
zero deaths · zero serious injuries

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY | Western Transportation Institute | Center for Health & Safety Culture

Talking Points for Driving after Using Cannabis

Traffic Safety

- More than 35,000 people die annually on our roadways.[i]
- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for young people (aged 8 to 24 years).[ii]
- Years of life lost from dying prematurely in a motor vehicle crash total more than 1.3 million years.[ii]
    - That is the equivalent of the working careers of more than 40,000 doctors.
    - Imagine what diseases could be cured with these medical resources.
- To reach our vision of zero traffic fatalities, we need to examine <u>all</u> crash factors including impaired driving.[iii]

Driver Impairment

- Driver impairment involving alcohol and other drugs is a significant risk factor in fatal motor vehicle crashes.[iv]
- While the prevalence of drivers testing positive for alcohol is decreasing, the prevalence of drivers testing positive for other drugs is increasing – especially driving after using cannabis (DUIC).[v]
- Much more is known about the effects of alcohol on driver impairment and crash risk than for cannabis.[vi]
- Cannabis is a different type of drug than alcohol; it is more difficult to predict its effects on an individual driver and resulting crash risk.[vi]

Cannabis

- Cannabis is a plant-based drug, which changes neurological functioning and psychological state – either for recreational or medicinal purposes.[vii]
- The primary active ingredient of cannabis is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).[vii]
- Many factors determine the effect of THC, and there is variability in the conclusions made across different studies.[viii]
- To overcome this variability, special analytic methods that combine results from multiple studies to estimate the “true” (average) effects can be used.[ix]
- THC is absorbed in the blood and transported to the brain where it alters brain activity and impairs cognitive functions – especially the capacity to direct attention and control behavior appropriately.[x]
- Safe driving depends on many of these cognitive functions, so when these functions are impaired, the ability to drive safely is also impaired.[xi]
- Some users may report that they can compensate for the effects of cannabis. However, evidence suggests that it is not possible to compensate successfully for all forms of impairment that impact driving and safety.[xii]

Driving Under the Influence of Cannabis and Crash Risk

- Most drivers (>90%) do not DUIC and have negative attitudes about this behavior.[xiii]
- Drivers with detected levels of THC make more unsafe acts while driving that result in crashes.[xiv]
- Drivers with detected levels of THC are over-represented in crashes related to inattention and speeding. [xv]
- Drivers with detected levels of THC are more often responsible for the crashes in which they are involved.[xvi]
- Drivers with detected levels of THC are twice as likely to die in a crash (even higher when combined with other drugs such as alcohol).[xvii]
- Currently, evidence that legalization of cannabis increases the number of fatal crashes is neither consistent nor sufficient.[xviii] There is a need to examine this question in more states over longer post-legislation periods.

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