

The Workplace Impact of Marijuana and Driving

Because a majority of states have some form of legalized marijuana, it's important for employers to be aware of the possible impact of marijuana to their business and identify and implement strategies to mitigate risk, especially for businesses that include driving as part of their operation.

Despite legalization by individual states, marijuana still remains federally illegal. Actions by several U.S government agencies and administrations have upheld that position. The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued notices in recent years that specifically addressed the use of marijuana, for both medical and recreation purposes, and reiterated the ban against it for drivers or operators that are performing their DOT covered safety sensitive functions. Driving impaired is still illegal in all states regardless of marijuana status.

Employees that use marijuana and other drugs negatively impact the bottom line for employers due to increased workplace accidents, injuries, and other effects, impacting the cost of doing business. The safety of all employees, vendors, customers, other drivers, pedestrians, or the general public could be in danger.

With regard to marijuana, one early study found that users had 85% more injuries at work than non-users.(1) Driving under the influence of marijuana is dangerous and adversely affects judgement, coordination, and reaction time, all important driving skills.(2-4) A 2012 analysis of nine epidemiological studies conducted by researchers at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Department of Public Health concluded that drivers that test positive for marijuana are more than twice as likely as other drivers to be involved in a collision.(5) Research has further supported this dangerous effect following legalization of medical marijuana:

- Since 2013, Colorado marijuana-related traffic deaths have increased 151% while all Colorado related traffic deaths increased 35%.(6-7)
- Colorado traffic deaths that were marijuana related increased from 11% in 2013 to 21% in 2017.(6-7)

Even now, companies across the country who employ drivers have a difficult time finding employment candidates who can pass required drug tests. Those prospective drivers who abuse drugs often seek jobs with companies that don't drug test. With youth consuming marijuana earlier than ever, there have been concerns raised about the state of future workforce readiness.

Companies that employ drivers may wish to implement a comprehensive drug-free workplace policy along with drug testing. Educating employees to understand the dangers of substance use including marijuana, conducting safe driving programs, and training supervisors on the signs of impairment, are some additional measures that employers can use to proactively address the increase of drug use among the workforce. Consistent and fair application of the company drug-free workplace policy will provide a foundation for reducing and hopefully eliminating workplace problems associated with drug and alcohol abuse.

1) Zwerling and Associates. JAMA Vol. 264; pp.2639-2643. 1990. 2) Lenné MG, et al. The effects of cannabis and alcohol on simulated arterial driving: Influences of driving experience and task demand. *Accid Anal Prev.* 2010;42(3):859-866. doi:10.1016/j.aap.2009.04.021. 3) Hartman RL, Huestis MA. Cannabis effects on driving skills. *Clin Chem.* 2013;59(3):478-492. doi:10.1373/clinchem.2012.194381. 4) Hartman RL, et al. Cannabis effects on driving lateral control with and without alcohol. *Drug Alcohol Depend.* 2015;154:25-37. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2015.06.015. 5) Li, Mu-Chen, et al. "Marijuana use and motor vehicle crashes." *Epidemiological reviews* 34.1 (2012): 65-72. 6) NHTSA, Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), 2006-2011 data. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/research-data/fatality-analysis-reporting-system-fars>. 7) CO Dept. of Transportation, 2012-2017 data. <https://www.codot.gov/safety/safety-data-sources-information>.

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