

Medical Marihuana Involved in California Fatal Crashes

2014 Data

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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

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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.

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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>