

THE LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA IN COLORADO *THE IMPACT*

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Rocky Mountain High Intensity
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary	1
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Introduction	7
--------------------	---

Purpose	7
---------------	---

The Debate	7
------------------	---

Background	8
------------------	---

Preface	8
---------------	---

Colorado's History with Marijuana Legalization	9
--	---

Early Medical Marijuana 2000-2008	9
---	---

Medical Marijuana Commercialization and Expansion 2009-Present	9
--	---

Recreational Marijuana 2013-Present	11
---	----

SECTION 1: Impaired Driving	13
-----------------------------------	----

Introduction	13
--------------------	----

Definitions	13
-------------------	----

Some Findings	14
---------------------	----

Data for Traffic Deaths	15
-------------------------------	----

Total Number of Statewide Traffic Deaths	16
--	----

Marijuana-Related Traffic Deaths	16
--	----

Average Number of Traffic Deaths Related to Marijuana	17
---	----

Traffic Deaths Related to Marijuana	17
---	----

Percent of All Traffic Deaths That Were Marijuana Related	18
---	----

Operators Testing Positive for Marijuana	18
--	----

Average Number of Operators Testing Positive for Marijuana	19
--	----

Percent of Operators Tested Who Were Positive for Marijuana	19
---	----

Drug Combinations for Operators Testing Positive for Marijuana	20
--	----

Data for Impaired Driving	20
---------------------------------	----

Trends in Cannabinoid Screens & THC Confirmations in Colorado 2009-2014	21
---	----

Number of Cannabinoid Screens	22
-------------------------------------	----

Number of Positive Cannabinoid Screens	22
--	----

Number of Positive Cannabinoid Screens with Active THC	23
--	----

Colorado State Patrol Number of DUIDs, 2014	24
---	----

Denver Police Department Number of DUIDs Involving Marijuana	25
--	----

Aurora Police Department Number of DUIDs, 2014	25
--	----

Larimer County Sheriff's Office Percent of DUIs Involving Marijuana	26
Number of DUI Admissions to Arapahoe House with Marijuana as a Self-Reported Drug of Choice	26
Total Number of Accidents in Colorado	27
Related Costs	27
Drug Recognition Experts.....	28
Case Examples and Related Material.....	28
Sources	32
SECTION 2: Youth Marijuana Use	35
Introduction	35
Some Findings	35
Data	37
Colorado Average Past Month Use of Marijuana Ages 12 to 17 Years Old.....	37
Youth (Ages 12 to 17 Years Old) Past Month Marijuana Use National vs. Colorado	37
Prevalence of Past 30-Day Marijuana Use, 12 to 17 Years Old, 2006-2012 (U.S., Denver Metro and Colorado)	38
National Average Past Month Use by 12 to 17 Years Old, 2013	38
State by State Past Month Usage by 12 to 17 Years Old, 2013.....	39
Top and Bottom States for Past Month Marijuana Use Youth (12 to 17 Years Old), 2013.....	40
Drug-Related Suspensions/Expulsions	40
Average Drug-Related Suspensions/Expulsions	41
Percentage of Total Suspensions in Colorado from 2004-2014 School Years.....	42
Percentage of Total Expulsions in Colorado from 2004-2014 School Years.....	42
Percentage of Total Referrals to Law Enforcement in Colorado from 2004-2014 School Years.....	43
Colorado Probation Average Percent Positive THC Urinalyses Ages 12 to 17 Years Old	43
Colorado School Resource Officer Survey.....	44
Predominant Marijuana Violations, 2015	44
Student Marijuana Source, 2015	45
Some Comments from School Resource Officers	45
School Counselor Survey	46
Predominant Marijuana Violations, 2015	47
Student Marijuana Source, 2015	48
Some Comments from School Counselors	48
Youth Use Surveys Not Utilized and Why	52
Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)	52
Monitoring the Future (MTF) Study	52
Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS)	53
Related Material	53

Sources.....	58
SECTION 3: Adult Marijuana Use.....	61
Introduction	61
Some Findings	62
Data	63
College Age (18 to 25 Years Old).....	63
Average Past Month Use of Marijuana College Age	63
College Age Past Month Marijuana Use (National vs. Colorado)	64
Prevalence of Past 30-Day Marijuana Use 2006-2012 (United States, Denver Metro and Colorado)	64
States for Past Month Marijuana Use College-Age, 2013.....	65
State of Colorado Probation Number of Positive THC Urinalyses	65
Adults (26+ Years Old)	66
Average Past Month Use of Marijuana.....	66
Adult Past Month Marijuana Use (National vs. Colorado)	66
Prevalence of Past 30-Day Marijuana Use, 2006-2012, (United States, Denver Metro and Colorado)	67
States for Past Month Marijuana Use Adults, 2013.....	67
State of Colorado Probation Number of Positive THC Urinalyses	68
Colorado Adult Marijuana Use Demographics	68
Related Material	69
Sources.....	72
SECTION 4: Emergency Room and Hospital Marijuana-Related	
Admissions.....	75
Introduction	75
Some Findings	75
Definitions	77
Data	77
Marijuana-Related Emergency Room Visits.....	77
Colorado Emergency Department Rates that are Likely Related to Marijuana	78
Colorado Emergency Department Rates that Could be Related to Marijuana	79
Emergency Department Rates Per 100,000 Marijuana-Related, 2011-2013, Colorado and Denver	80
Hospitalizations Related to Marijuana.....	81
Average Marijuana-Related Hospitalizations	81
Colorado Hospitalization Rates that are Likely Related to Marijuana	82
Colorado Hospitalization Rates that Could be Related to Marijuana	83
Hospital Discharge Rates Per 100,000 Marijuana Related, 2007-2013, Colorado and Denver	84

Marijuana Ingestion Among Children Under 12 Years-of-Age.....	85
Cost	85
Related Material	85
Sources.....	87
SECTION 5: Marijuana-Related Exposure.....	89
Introduction	89
Some Findings	89
Data	91
All Ages, Average Number of Marijuana-Related Exposures.....	91
Number of Exposures Reported for Marijuana Only.....	91
Number of Marijuana-Related Exposures, by Age Range	92
Youth Ages 6 to 17 Years Old, Average Number of Marijuana-Related Exposures	92
Children Ages 0 to 5 Years Old, Average Number of Marijuana-Related Exposures....	93
Marijuana-Related Exposures Children Ages 0 to 5 Years Old.....	93
Average Percent of All Marijuana-Related Exposures, Ages 0 to 5 Years Old,	
National vs. Colorado	94
Related Material	94
Sources.....	95
SECTION 6: Treatment	97
Introduction	97
Some Findings	97
Data	98
Treatment with Marijuana as Primary Substance of Abuse, All Ages	98
Drug Type for Treatment Admissions, All Ages.....	99
Percent of Marijuana Treatment Admissions by Age Group.....	99
Marijuana Treatment Admissions Based on Criminal Justice Referrals	100
Sources.....	100
SECTION 7: Diversion of Colorado Marijuana	101
Introduction	101
Definitions	102
Some Findings	102
Data	103
Colorado Marijuana Interdiction Seizures.....	103
Average Pounds of Colorado Marijuana from Interdiction Seizures	104
States to Which Colorado Marijuana Was Destined (2014).....	105
Top Three Cities for Marijuana Origin.....	105
A Few Examples of Interdictions.....	105

A Few Examples of Investigations	111
A Few Examples of Diversion Involving Youth.....	116
Some Examples from School Resource Officers	117
Some Examples from School Counselors	118
Comments	118
Sources	119
SECTION 8: Diversion by Parcel	123
Introduction	123
Some Findings	123
Data	124
Parcels Containing Marijuana Mailed from Colorado to Another State	124
Pounds of Colorado Marijuana Seized by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.....	125
Number of States Destined to Receive Marijuana Mailed from Colorado.....	125
Colorado Marijuana Parcels Destined for Outside of the United States	126
Pounds of Colorado Marijuana Destined for Outside of the United States.....	126
Colorado Marijuana Destined for Outside of the United States, 2014.....	127
A Few Parcel Examples	127
Sources	130
SECTION 9: THC Extraction Labs	133
Introduction	133
Some Findings	134
Data	134
THC Extraction Lab Explosions	134
THC Extraction Lab Explosion Injuries.....	135
University of Colorado Hospital THC Extraction Lab Self-Admitted Burn Victims ..	135
Sources	136
SECTION 10: Related Data.....	137
Topics.....	137
Crime	137
Colorado Crime	138
All Reported Crime in Denver	138
City and County of Denver Crime.....	139
Total Marijuana-Related Crime for Denver City and County	139
Marijuana-Related Crime for Denver City and County	
(Industry and Non-Industry)	140
Denver Police Department Unlawful Public Display/Consumption of Marijuana	141
Boulder Police Department Marijuana Public Consumption Citations	141

Revenue	142
Total Revenue from Marijuana Taxes, Calendar Year 2014	142
Colorado's Total General Fund Revenue, FY 2015	143
Some Costs Related to Marijuana Revenue for the State of Colorado, FY 2015/16	144
Articles	144
Homeless	146
Total Overnight Beds Provided, January Through June	146
Related Material	146
Suicide Data	148
Average Toxicology of Suicides Among Adolescents Ages 10 to 19 Years Old, 2009-2013	149
Average Toxicology Results by Age Group Colorado, 2009-2013	149
Environmental Impact	149
THC Potency	151
Potency Monitoring Program – Average THC Percent DEA-Submitted Cannabis Samples 1995-2013 (National)	151
Potency Monitoring Program – Average THC Percent All Submitted Hash Oil Samples 1995-2013 (National)	152
Marijuana Use and Alcohol Consumption	153
Colorado Average Consumption of Alcohol in Gallons, Per Calendar Year	153
Medical Marijuana Registry	153
Medical Marijuana Registry Identification Cards	153
Profile of Colorado Medical Marijuana Cardholders	154
Percent of Medical Marijuana Patients Based on Reporting Condition	154
Colorado Licensed Marijuana Businesses as of January 2015	154
Business Comparisons, January 2015	155
Colorado Business Comparisons, January 2015	155
Denver Business Comparisons, January 2015	156
Demand and Market Size	156
2014 Reported Sales of Marijuana in Colorado	157
2014 Price of Marijuana	157
Local Response to the Medical and Recreational Marijuana Industry in Colorado	158
Polling	158
Lawsuits	159
Other Issues	160
Sources	161
SECTION 11: Reference Material	165
Reports	165
Articles	167

Executive Summary

Purpose

Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (RMHIDTA) is tracking the impact of marijuana legalization in the state of Colorado. This report will utilize, whenever possible, a comparison of three different eras in Colorado's legalization history:

- **2006 – 2008:** Early medical marijuana era
- **2009 – Present:** Medical marijuana commercialization and expansion era
- **2013 – Present:** Recreational marijuana era

Rocky Mountain HIDTA will collect and report comparative data in a variety of areas, including but not limited to:

- Impaired driving
- Youth marijuana use
- Adult marijuana use
- Emergency room admissions
- Marijuana-related exposure cases
- Diversion of Colorado marijuana

This is the third annual report on the impact of legalized marijuana in Colorado. It is divided into eleven sections, each providing information on the impact of marijuana legalization. The sections are as follows:

Section 1 – Impaired Driving:

- In 2014, when retail marijuana businesses began operating, there was a **32 percent** increase in marijuana-related traffic deaths in just one year from 2013.
- Colorado marijuana-related traffic deaths increased **92 percent** from 2010 – 2014. During the same time period all traffic deaths only increased **8 percent**.

- Marijuana-related traffic deaths were approximately **20 percent** of all traffic deaths in 2014 compared to half that (**10 percent**) just five years ago.
- In 2014, when retail marijuana businesses began operating, toxicology reports with positive marijuana results of active THC results for primarily driving under the influence have increased **45 percent** in just one year.

Section 2 – Youth Marijuana Use:

- In 2013, **11.16 percent** of Colorado youth ages 12 to 17 years old were considered current marijuana users compared to **7.15 percent** nationally. Colorado ranked 3rd in the nation and was **56 percent** higher than the national average.
- Drug-related suspensions/expulsions increased **40 percent** from school years 2008/2009 to 2013/2014. The vast majority were for marijuana violations.
- There was a **20 percent** increase in the percent of 12 to 17 year old probationers testing positive for marijuana since marijuana was legalized for recreational purposes.
- A 2015 survey of school resource officers and school counselors revealed similar results about increased school marijuana issues since the legalization of recreational marijuana.

Section 3 – Adult Marijuana Use:

- In 2013, **29 percent** of college age students (ages 18 to 25 years old) were considered current marijuana users compared to **18.91 percent** nationally. Colorado, ranked 2nd in the nation, was **54 percent** higher than the national average.
- In 2013, **10.13 percent** of adults ages 26 years old and over were considered current marijuana users compared to **5.45 percent** nationally. Colorado, ranked 5th in the nation, was **86 percent** higher than the national average.
- Probationers age 18 to 25 and 26+ years old testing positive for marijuana increased **49 and 87 percent** respectively since marijuana was legalized in 2013.

Section 4 – Emergency Room Marijuana and Hospital Marijuana-Related Admissions:

- In 2014, when retail marijuana businesses began operating, there was a **29 percent** increase in the number of marijuana-related emergency room visits in only one year.
- In 2014, when retail marijuana businesses began operating, there was a **38 percent** increase in the number of marijuana-related hospitalizations in only one year.
- In the three years after medical marijuana was commercialized, compared to the three years prior, there was a **46 percent** increase in hospitalizations related to marijuana.
- Children’s Hospital Colorado reported **2** marijuana ingestions among children under 12 in 2009 compared to **16** in 2014.

Section 5 – Marijuana-Related Exposure:

- In 2014, when retail marijuana businesses began operating, marijuana-only related exposures increased **72 percent** in only one year.
- In the years medical marijuana was commercialized (2009 – 2012), marijuana-related exposures averaged a **42 percent** increase from pre-commercialization years (2006 – 2008) average.
- During the years 2013 – 2014, the average number of all age exposures was 175 per year. Exposures have doubled since marijuana was legalized in Colorado.
- Young children (ages 0 to 5) marijuana-related exposures in Colorado:
 - During the years 2013 – 2014, the average number of children exposed was **31** per year.
 - This is a **138 percent** increase from the medical marijuana commercialization years (2009 – 2012) average which was a **225 percent** increase from pre-commercialization years (2006 – 2008).

Section 6 – Treatment:

- Over the last ten years, the top three drugs involved in treatment admissions, in descending order, were alcohol (average **12,943**), marijuana (average **6,491**) and methamphetamine (average **5,044**).
- Marijuana treatment data from Colorado in years 2005 – 2014 does not appear to demonstrate a definite trend. Colorado averages approximately **6,500** treatment admissions annual for marijuana abuse.

Section 7 – Diversion of Colorado Marijuana:

- During 2009 – 2012, when medical marijuana was commercialized, the yearly average number interdiction seizures of Colorado marijuana increased **365 percent** from **52** to **242** per year.
- During 2013 – 2014, when recreational marijuana was legalized, the yearly average interdiction seizures of Colorado marijuana increased another **34 percent** from **242** to **324**.
- The average pounds of Colorado marijuana seized, destined for 36 other states, increased **33 percent** from 2005 – 2008 compared to 2009 – 2014.

Section 8 – Diversion by Parcel:

- U.S. mail parcel interceptions of Colorado marijuana, destined for 38 other states, increased **2,033 percent** from 2010 – 2014.
- Pounds of Colorado marijuana seized in the U.S. mail, destined for 38 other states, increased **722 percent** from 2010 – 2014.
- From 2006 – 2008, compared to 2013 – 2014, the average number of seized parcels containing Colorado marijuana, that were destined outside the United States, increased over **7,750 percent** and pounds of marijuana seized in those parcels increased over **1,079 percent**.

Section 9 – THC Extraction Labs:

- In 2013, there were **12** THC extraction lab explosions compared to **32** in 2014.
- In 2013, there were **18** injuries from THC extraction lab explosions compared to **30** in 2014.

Section 10 – Related Data:

- Overall, crime in Denver increased 12.3 percent from 2012 to 2014.
- Colorado annual tax revenue from the sale of recreational marijuana was **52.5** million (CY2014) or about **0.7 percent** of total general fund revenue (FY2015).
- The majority of cities and counties in Colorado have banned recreational marijuana businesses.
- National THC potency has risen from an average of **3.96 percent** in 1995 to an average of **12.55 percent** in 2013. The average potency in Colorado was **17.1 percent**.
- Homelessness increased with the appeal of legal marijuana being a factor.
- Denver has more licensed medical marijuana centers (**198**) than pharmacies (**117**).

Section 11 – Related Material:

- This section lists various studies and reports.

There is much more data in each of the eleven sections, which can be used as a standalone document. All of the sections are on the Rocky Mountain HIDTA website and can be printed individually; go to www.rmhidta.org/Reports.

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