

## Press Release

October 26, 2009

### *Rates of Drugged Driving are Approaching those of Drunk Driving -- Implications for Legalizing Marijuana*

**Washington, DC.** Driving under the influence of illegal drugs is a serious problem on the nation's highways. Drugged driving, with marijuana the most prevalent of the illegal drugs, is now more common than drunk driving. Any move towards the legalization of marijuana must take into account the probable consequence of increased marijuana use for highway safety.

In the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's recent National Roadside Survey (NRS) of alcohol and drug use by drivers, researchers found that 8.63% of weekend night time drivers tested positive for marijuana compared to 2.2% of drivers with blood alcohol concentrations (BAC) at or above the legal limit of 0.08 g/dL.<sup>i</sup> Illegal drugs were present more than 7 times as frequently as alcohol in those surveyed.

A recent study found that a total of 51% of seriously injured drivers admitted to a Maryland Level-1 shock-trauma center had positive blood toxicology results for illegal drugs.<sup>ii</sup> A total of 26.9% of drivers in the study tested positive for marijuana, approximating the 30.6% of drivers that tested positive for alcohol.

The Institute for Behavior and Health, Inc. (IBH) estimates that about 20% of all crashes each year are caused by drugged driving.<sup>iii</sup> This translates into 8,600 deaths<sup>iv</sup>, 580,000 injuries<sup>v</sup>, and \$33,000,000,000 in damages every year<sup>vi</sup> due to drugged driving.

Illegal drug use is not a victimless crime. The laws against drug use and sale are important public health measures that reduce the negative consequences of drug use, including drugged driving. Federal law, administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation, prohibits the use of marijuana and other illegal drugs by commercial drivers for the good reason that drugged driving is a major threat to highway safety. This prohibition extends to airline pilots and railroad train engineers

Legalizing marijuana poses substantial risks, including increasing drugged driving.

To learn more about IBH and drugged driving visit:  
[www.ibhinc.org](http://www.ibhinc.org) and [www.StopDruggedDriving.org](http://www.StopDruggedDriving.org).

**Robert L. DuPont, M.D.**  
**President, Institute for Behavior and Health, Inc.**  
**Former White House Drug Czar**  
**Founding Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).**

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<sup>i</sup> Richard Compton, & Amy Berning, Results of the 2007 National Survey of Alcohol and Drug Use By Drivers. National Highway Traffic Safety Facts. Washington, DC: NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis (July 2009) DOT HS 811 175

<sup>ii</sup> J. Michael Walsh, Ron Flegel, Randolph Atkins, Leo A. Cangianelli, Carnell Cooper, Christopher Welsh and Timothy J. Kerns, Drug and Alcohol Use Among Drivers Admitted to a Level-1 Trauma Center, Accident Analysis and Prevention, Volume 37, Issue 5, Pages 894-901 (September 2005)

<sup>iii</sup> 20% is a conservative estimate based on:

- J.M. Walsh's finding that 50% of seriously injured drivers tested positive for drugs OTA (Walsh JM, Flegel R, et al Acc Anal Prev 37, 2005)
- Barry Logan's study showing 35% of fatally-injured drivers test positive for drugs (Schwilke, dos Santos, Logan, J For Sci, 2006)
- Barry Logan's trucker drug-testing study which found 21% of truckers test positive for drugs (Couper, Logan. J For Sci, 2001)
- CDC estimates that 18% of traffic accidents are drug-related (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/driving.htm>)
- NIDA estimates that drugs are used by 10% to 22% of drivers in collisions (<http://www.nida.nih.gov/infofacts/driving.html>)
- NHTSA notes that, for fatally injured drivers, cannabis is detected in 7% to 37% with a mean of 14%. Each of five other drugs can be found in about 5% or less (<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/>)

<sup>iv</sup> Figure based on IBH's conservative estimate that 20% of vehicle crashes are attributable to drugged driving, and recent data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System

<sup>v</sup> Figure based on IBH's conservative estimate that 20% of vehicle crashes are attributable to drugged driving, and the most recent data from the NHTSA

<sup>vi</sup> Figure based on IBH's conservative estimate that 20% of vehicle crashes are attributable to drugged driving, and recent data from AAA's estimate that the cost of car accidents costs \$164.2 billion dollars annually