



NEWS RELEASE

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New Data Show Five Fold Jump in Fatal Pot Crashes Continues Unabated

Los Angeles, CA – New data show fatal vehicle crashes involving marijuana in Los Angeles County not only spiked dramatically with the advent of retail dispensaries, but continued at significantly higher rates a decade later.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, fatal crashes in which the driver tested positive for marijuana increased by over 500 percent in Los Angeles County following the 2004 enactment of SB 420, the bill that initiated the rapid growth of medical marijuana businesses statewide.

Although other causes could have also contributed to the surge of marijuana-involved traffic accidents and deaths after 2004, the magnitude of the change coinciding with increased access to medical marijuana could impact the debate about legalizing recreational use.

"Many youth tend to think that alcohol use has more consequences than marijuana use and therefore view marijuana use as safer than drinking," stated Dr. Elizabeth D'Amico, Senior Behavioral Scientist at RAND Corporation. "However, youth need to better understand the harms of marijuana use, and that driving under the influence of any substance has serious safety implications."

"If marijuana is legalized for recreational use in California this November, it will significantly impact highway safety, our youth, and communities at large," said Sergeant Glenn Walsh, Los Angeles County Narcotics Bureau.

Vehicle crashes already take a disproportionate share of young lives. In Los Angeles County, motor vehicle crashes are the No. 2 cause of death for 5-24 year olds.¹

As marijuana-related issues continue to dominate public discourse, communities throughout the county, the state and country are scrambling to develop policies that protect the health, safety and interests of their residents.

Local public health advocates have formed a coalition called Rethinking Access to Marijuana (RAM). Their approach is to focus on preventing marijuana-related harm to youth.

While RAM members are not advocating the repeal of legal medical marijuana or necessarily opposing legal recreational use, they are seeking to ensure that adequate safeguards are in place to prevent unintended harms to others – especially youth.

"Many youth may not be aware of the risks of driving while high or have the misperception that it's fine," said Gilbert Mora, Chair of Rethinking Access to Marijuana. "We need to do all we can to prevent an increase in marijuana-involved deaths."



Youth already report a high risk to themselves by driving while intoxicated. A comprehensive national study on unsafe driving among adolescents found that 28 percent of high school seniors drove after using drugs or drinking heavily, or rode in a car with a driver that had been using drugs or drinking heavily, at least once in the prior two weeks.²

According to a study published in the British Medical Journal, crash risk doubles for those driving within four hours of consuming marijuana. More than half a million Americans are injured in drugged driving crashes each year, and drugged driving collisions cost the U.S. economy more than \$60 billion annually.³ While nationally driving under the influence of alcohol is more common than marijuana, a 201 roadside survey of California's nighttime weekend drivers found that positive tests for marijuana use (7.4 percent) were slightly higher than for alcohol use (7.3 percent).⁴

California's newly established Bureau of Medical Marijuana Regulation is tasked with developing regulations to prevent and enforce drugged driving, but it is unknown as to when this will occur or if any public education on the dangers of driving while under the influence of marijuana is planned.

About Rethinking Access to Marijuana (RAM)

RAM is a collaboration of public health professionals seeking to prevent marijuana-related harms by limiting youth access to marijuana in the County of Los Angeles. The group was established with the vision of educating communities about the potential harms of marijuana use; implementing and evaluating environmental strategies formulated to limit youth accessibility to and availability of marijuana; and influencing policy actions that support flourishing youth and communities free from marijuana-related harms.

RAM neither supports nor opposes any specific legislation. Rather, RAM takes a prevention-oriented public health approach, educating policy-makers and communities about ways to protect youth from the potential harms of marijuana use and abuse.

RAM is a collaboration of over 25 community-based groups, including:

- *Asian American Drug Abuse Program*
- *Behavioral Health Services, Inc.*
- *Children's Hospital Los Angeles*
- *Day One*
- *Helpline Youth Counseling*
- *Koreatown Youth and Community Center*
- *LA County Office of Education*
- *MJB Transitional Recovery*
- *National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence - San Fernando Valley*
- *National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence of the East San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys*
- *Partnership for a Positive Pomona*
- *People Coordinated Services of Southern California, Inc.*
- *Pueblo y Salud*
- *Phoenix House*
- *San Fernando Valley Partnership*
- *Shields for Families*
- *Social Model Recovery Services*
- *South Central Prevention Coalition*
- *SPIRITT Family Services*
- *Tarzana Treatment Centers, Inc.*
- *Watts Healthcare Corporation*
- *Westside Impact Project*
- *Venice Bridge Project*



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Click [here](#) for a graph of the timeline and NHTSA data.

1. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, "Mortality In Los Angeles County 2011," 2011.
2. O'Malley, P.M., and Johnston, L.D., "Driving After Drug or Alcohol Use by US High School Seniors, 2001–2011," *Am J Public Health*. 2013 November; 103(11): 2027–2034, Published 2013 November, doi: [10.2105/AJPH.2013.301246](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301246).
3. NHTSA, 2014.
4. Lacey, J. H., Kelley-Baker, T., Romano, E., Brainard, K., Ramirez, A., & Calverton, M. D. (2012). Results of the 2012 California roadside survey of nighttime weekend drivers' alcohol and drug use. Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, Calverton, MD.