

Essential Education: Marijuana and Driving

Cannabis availability is exploding in Texas. When combined with alcohol, cannabis is the number one drug category in fatal and serious injury crashes in Texas.



Authors

Christine Adams
TTI Assistant Research Scientist

Cody Stewart
TTI Associate Transportation
Researcher

Project Need and Approach

As more states legalize cannabis, the frequency of cannabis-related crashes is rising. As of November 2022, 21 states and the District of Columbia have legalized cannabis for recreational use, while 37 states, including Texas, have legalized it for medical use. Although recreational marijuana remains illegal in Texas, momentum is growing. Some cities have decriminalized low-level possession, and neighboring states are moving toward legalization. Texas has seen legislative activity, including the expansion of the Compassionate Use Program, and several bills were pre-filed for 2023, including a proposal to amend the state constitution to regulate cannabis possession, cultivation, and sale.

Legalization often correlates with increased drug-impaired driving and fatalities. States such as Washington, Colorado, and California each reported a rise in tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)-related fatal crashes following legalization. A recent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) study revealed that 25.1 percent of seriously or fatally injured drivers tested positive for active THC, surpassing alcohol. Public perception of marijuana as less risky than other substances contributes to its increased use and impaired driving.

To combat this growing issue, NHTSA and the Governor's Highway Safety Association have urged states to develop robust education programs on drug-impaired driving. In response, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) proposed a project to educate the public on marijuana use and its effects on driving. The initiative aims to prevent the spike in fatalities seen in other states following legalization by raising awareness and promoting safer behaviors.

This project educates the public on the effects of marijuana impairment on driving through a train-the-trainer approach and self-guided online courses.



Project Activities

TTI launched initiatives to combat marijuana-impaired driving through public education and training. Efforts included creating a strategic plan; developing an online module, *Cannabis Products in Texas*; and revising the marijuana and driving curriculum. The updated curriculum addressed the scope of the problem, marijuana's effects on the body and driving, and solutions to reduce impaired driving. It also featured an expanded guidebook for public education, with instructions for dissemination and audience targeting, along with a revised self-guided training module distributed electronically.

Outreach activities included four presentations to traffic safety stakeholders and participation in a national cannabis summit to learn best practices. Using a train-the-trainer model, TTI trained over 80 individuals through workshops conducted statewide, including at the Texas Traffic Safety Conference. New topics, like hemp-derived products, were introduced based on feedback, and the online training reached a broad audience of traffic safety professionals.

These efforts raised awareness of marijuana-impaired driving risks, emphasizing the dangers of combining THC and alcohol.

Benefits to Texas Transportation Safety

The marijuana education project aimed to reduce drug-impaired driving in Texas by educating key traffic safety stakeholders about the dangers of cannabis-impaired driving. The curriculum incorporated best practices for improving traffic safety, drawing from recommendations of states that have legalized cannabis for adult use. Through outreach and education, this project aimed to reduce the frequency and severity of crashes caused by drug-impaired driving.

Funding and Support

This project was funded through a grant by the Texas Department of Transportation Behavioral Traffic Safety Program.

The Texas A&M Transportation Institute Center for Transportation Safety provided match funding support.

For More Information

Christine Adams

Assistant Research Scientist
Center for Alcohol and Drug Education
Studies

1111 RELLIS Parkway
Bryan, TX 77807-3135
(979) 317-2547
c-adams@tti.tamu.edu

Publication date: 2024