

DID YOU KNOW???

MIXING POT AND DRIVING IS NOT OK

It sure looks like support for legalizing recreational marijuana use nationwide is at a record high and gaining ground. According to polls, a majority of Americans have consistently supported legalizing marijuana since 2013. However, a nationwide survey conducted last spring by Mutual Insurance and Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) found that roughly a third of teens and a quarter of parents of licensed teen drivers think it is legal to drive under the influence of marijuana in states that permit recreational use of the drug for adults.

A 2016 Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) survey of drivers 18 and older found similar attitudes about marijuana use. Nationally, driving after using marijuana wasn't perceived as negatively as driving after consuming alcohol. "Impairment of any kind is a significant problem on the road," says David Zuby, IIHS executive vice president and chief research officer. "Whether someone is impaired by alcohol, marijuana or other drugs, they should not be behind the wheel."

"Anyone who is driving while under the influence of any drug or alcohol is violating our laws against driving while impaired by alcohol or other drugs", says Penny Clute, former District Attorney in Clinton County. She points out that your judgment, coordination and reflexes can be just as impaired by a prescription drug as one that you buy illegally on the street.

Among the teens surveyed, 22 percent said that driving under the influence of marijuana is common among their friends. "Starting a dialogue early and engaging teens about the dangers of driving high before they have their license can be an effective way to reinforce the message prior to getting behind the wheel," says Dr. Gene Beresin, senior adviser on adolescent psychiatry with SADD.

All 50 states and the District of Columbia have per se laws making it a crime to drive with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) at or above a specified level, currently 0.08 percent (0.08 g alcohol per 100 ml blood). Utah passed a law in March 2017 making it a crime to drive with a BAC of 0.05 percent or above. The law will take effect on Dec. 30, 2018. All states and D.C. have drug-impaired driving laws, too, but the specific provisions for marijuana and other drugs differ. Eighteen states have zero tolerance or non-zero per se laws for THC or a metabolite, according to information compiled by the Governors Highway Safety Association. THC, or Tetrahydrocannabinol, is the primary psychoactive component of cannabis.

The nationwide survey, conducted during April and May 2017, points to the need to better educate teens and their parents about how marijuana affects driving, Liberty Mutual and SADD say.

Credit goes to the IIHS and the November 21, 2017 issue of "Status Report" for information presented in this article. For more articles on Vehicle and Traffic Law and traffic safety, go to the Traffic Safety Board's website at: www.franklincony.org/ and click on the Traffic Safety Board from the pull-down menu under departments.