

SB 0516 – Cannabis Reform

As a member of GASP (Group Against Smokers' Pollution and NARFE (National Active and Retired Federal Employee Association), I am requesting that the state prohibit the smoking and vaping of marijuana. Not only does marijuana contain the toxins of tobacco smoke, but it also contains 3.5 times the particulate matter and other toxins, as well as the intoxicant THC. Second-hand marijuana smoke is even more hazardous than tobacco smoke, and vaping of cannabis and other chemicals can create indoor pollution similar to that of industrial air pollution, causing respiratory and heart disease.

In reference to the intoxicating nature of THC, it is very easy to become "high" from the smoke in even a large, partially enclosed space. For example, many years ago, when marijuana was, in fact, not as powerful as it is now, I once became highly intoxicated in a large open-windowed party room while within about six feet of a small group of people smoking marijuana from a "bong". Within a couple of minutes, as I noticed the smell of the smoke, I became extremely intoxicated; my personality changed, and I immediately was very slow in my thinking and reaction time. A few hours later, when the smokers in the room said they were fine with driving home, I warned them, in my apparently slow speech, not to drive because I knew that I would never be able to drive safely in my condition. Still, the others confidently assured me that they could do so. While being driven "home," I was not able to concentrate enough to read or remember any written materials (like street signs!) and would have been able to react only very slowly to a sudden traffic hazard. Despite increased visual acuity, I lacked a sense of time or distance, had poor coordination, and simply felt happy and giddy. It is now very disconcerting to think of people in this condition driving a motor vehicle, however common that seems to be.

A document, entitled "Background on: Marijuana and Impaired Driving," on the Insurance Information Institute Web site (www.iii.org), cites statistics showing how impairment resulting from intoxication from inhaling marijuana causes a significant increase in serious motor vehicle accidents and recreational use of marijuana creates increasing insurance ramifications. In keeping with my experience with this drug, a driver who is not a marijuana user, but happens to be sitting next to someone smoking it, or even just breathing fumes remaining in a car used by a marijuana smoker, could soon be intoxicated suddenly and, therefore, be in danger of a fatal accident.

Worse than my personal experience is that of a friend in college who was smoking in bed and became so high that he fell asleep with the lit joint in his hand and, thus, burned down his entire fraternity house. In classrooms also and even in the workplace, students cannot learn or perform properly. As a federal government worker at the time, I had always stayed away from places where people were using illegal drugs; however, at this one gathering far from my home on a vacation trip, I had not even been aware that marijuana was present until someone brought it into the room, and then it was too late. I almost lost my job clearance (and my government job); every five years, I had to revisit the occurrence in a reinvestigation. There could also be undesirable effects on productivity resulting from second-hand exposures on the ride to work, but also outside on foot, where the smoke is known to be extremely irritating and harmful to many people.

Needless to say, accidents, fires, poor job performance, pollution resulting in disease and – yes - climate change, and higher government spending (decimating any profits from legalizing marijuana smoking), are among so many harmful consequences from this type of smoking and vaping should certainly make us all learn from the dangers of cigarette smoking and do everything possible to prevent far worse situations for our Maryland residents.