

# Let's Be Clear Georgia

## A Collaborative to Prevent Marijuana Abuse

Let's Be Clear Georgia is a partnership of private and public agencies, employers, and individuals engaging in best practices and policies to prevent marijuana abuse in our state.

### Marijuana and Driving



#### DRUGGED DRIVING

"The effects of specific drugs of abuse differ depending on how they act in the brain, but all impair faculties necessary for the safe operation of a vehicle. These faculties include motor skills, balance and coordination, perception, attention, reaction time, and judgment. Even small amounts of some drugs can have a measurable effect on driving ability."<sup>1</sup> In 2009 in the United States, 63% of fatally injured drivers were tested for the presence of drugs, which is equivalent to 3,952 fatally injured drivers. Illegal drugs, including marijuana,

accounted for almost half of all positive drug tests.<sup>2</sup>

#### MARIJUANA AND DRIVING

Marijuana significantly impairs judgment, motor coordination, and reaction time, and studies have found a direct relationship between blood THC concentration and impaired driving ability.<sup>3,4</sup> When marijuana is smoked, THC gets into the blood stream rapidly, travels to the brain and creates a chemical imbalance. These changes make users feel high and euphoric, experience distortions in the perception of time as well as an altered state of consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

Accident-involved drivers with THC in their blood, particularly at higher levels, are three to seven times more likely to be responsible for an accident than drivers who had not used drugs or alcohol. The risk associated with marijuana in combination with alcohol appear to be greater than that for either drug by itself.<sup>6</sup> Research shows that impairment increases significantly when marijuana use is combined with alcohol.<sup>7</sup>

#### THE FACTS

- 25% of seriously injured drivers test positive for marijuana.<sup>5</sup>
- Marijuana is the most commonly detected illicit substance in fatal car accidents.<sup>5</sup>
- Marijuana use doubles the risk of car crashes.<sup>8</sup>
- Marijuana is the illicit drug most frequently found in the blood of drivers who have been involved in accidents, including fatal ones.<sup>9</sup>
- Although medical marijuana and recreational marijuana use is legal in some states, it is illegal to drive under the influence of marijuana – in some states there is a limit on the amount you can have in your blood and in others you cannot have any trace of THC in the blood.<sup>10</sup>

## WHAT GEORGIANS SHOULD KNOW:

1) In 15 states, it is illegal to operate a motor vehicle if there is any detectable level of a prohibited drug, or its metabolites, in the driver's blood. This is known as a "per se" law.

2) Other state laws define "drugged driving" as driving when a drug "renders the driver incapable of driving safely" or "causes the driver to be impaired." 11

3) Georgia falls into this second category when it comes to marijuana and a number of other drugs. In Georgia it is illegal to operate a vehicle if law enforcement determines the driver is under the influence of marijuana (or cocaine, heroin, xanax, etc.) AND his/her driving is LESS SAFE as a result.

So at this time there is not a "per se" marijuana DUI law in Georgia, just this "less safe" version. And having a Georgia "medical" marijuana card does not create an exception for the driver. So if law enforcement deems a person is under the influence of "medical" marijuana AND a less safe driver, then they will be charged with a DUI.<sup>12</sup>

4) Drivers who test positive for marijuana or self-report using marijuana are more than twice as likely as other drivers to be involved in motor vehicle crashes. 13

5) Marijuana is the most commonly detected drug other than alcohol in drivers. 14

## TO LEARN MORE VISIT:

<http://clearga.org/marijuana-driving>

## SOURCES

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