

ILLEGAL drug abuse

MARIJUANA

At different times, marijuana has been classified as a narcotic, a sedative and a psychedelic drug. Recently it has been given its own separate classification. The main active ingredient in marijuana is tetrahydrocannabinol, usually referred to as THC. In small doses it produces sedation somewhat like alcohol and the anti-anxiety drugs librium and valium. However, in higher doses a mild psychedelic effect occurs.

Marijuana, or cannabis, is grown in all parts of the world, and many different forms of this drug are found. Large quantities are produced in Columbia, Mexico and Hawaii. Maui Wowie and Kona Gold are popular Hawaiian varieties and similar to sinsemilla. Acapulco Gold, Oaxacan and Panama Red, known for the reddish tint of small hairs which grow around the flowering tops, are all varieties grown in Mexico and Central America.

One of the most popular types of marijuana is sinsemilla. This seedless variety is grown by isolating the female plants from the male plants and allowing the female plants to mature without being pollinated. The female plant then directs most of its growing energy into the production of heavily THC-laden resin. Analysis of sinsemilla plants indicate a THC range of 4-8%.

One of the greatest changes in the growing of marijuana, especially in California, has been the introduction of sinsemilla. When these plants are crossed with other varieties to produce hybrids, they are large with many large buds. Because of the excellent growing conditions in northern California, each plant may yield a pound of tips. At prices ranging from \$1200 to \$2000 per pound, a small garden can mean large profits for the grower. Statistics on this illegal

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Harvest of marijuana crop

agricultural business are hard to verify, but in Mendocino County the annual crop is estimated to exceed \$100 million. Authorities estimate statewide profits in excess of a billion dollars.

Thai Sticks or Thai is another variety of marijuana that is often found. This type of marijuana comes from the Golden Triangle, the area including Thailand, Burma and Laos. There the growing conditions are ideal and the soil extremely fertile. Growers allow the mature marijuana plants to bud and flower. The flowering tops of the plants, which contain the highest concentration of resin, are harvested. The tops are then attached to short bamboo stalks by wrapping with stringy material peeled from the stalk of the plant. Fifteen to twenty of these sticks are wrapped into individual bundles weighing about one ounce. The THC content is about the same as that of sinsemilla.

Hashish is the concentrated resin of the marijuana plant, containing a THC level of 10-20%. The main producers of hashish are India, Morocco, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Mexico, as well as the Caribbean regions. The resinous secretions are collected from the marijuana plants by a variety of means, then dried, compressed and formed into balls, sheets or cakes. High quality hashish is dark brown or black and is generally sold in small lumps or sticks. Lower quality hashish is lighter in color, often with a green tint, and sold in larger quantities.

Hashish oil is an illegally manufactured form of Tincture or Extract of Cannabis, once used by physicians for medicinal purposes. In 1937, this preparation was made illegal and was rarely found in use until it appeared in southern California in the early 1970's. Because it is 30-40 times stronger than marijuana and 3-4 times stronger than hashish, it is a very popular drug and has spread throughout California. Its THC content is between 20-60%.

Many users prefer hashish to marijuana because its increased potency produces a quicker and more intense high. The most common method of use is by smoking, but it is sometimes prepared in

food or boiled in tea. Hash oil is often added to commercial or marijuana cigarettes and smoked. It may also be boiled into a tea or added to other liquids and foods. Heat, air and light cause the oil to harden, so it must be kept in an airtight container away from light or heat.

The federal government has spent millions of dollars for research on the effects of marijuana. Research has focused on the effects of this drug on the heart and lungs, on pregnant women, on the social and psychological development of users and on its possible medical uses. These research efforts, many of which are supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, are continuing today.

Research has found that marijuana affects memory and impairs intellectual functioning to a degree that it would be expected to interfere with classroom learning among most student users. Similarly, it adversely affects driving skills in most people and flying skills in experienced pilots. Because of the high tar and hydro-carbon levels of marijuana smoke, the correlation of heavy mari-

juana smoking and lung cancer is being investigated. Lung damage, such as chronic bronchitis, has been found in heavy smokers of marijuana. There is



Mature sinsemilla bud



From left to right: roach clip, roach, and an unused joint.

evidence that marijuana increases the heart rate after smoking. In those individuals with impaired heart function, marijuana may cause acute chest pain.

While research concerning the effects of marijuana smoking on reproduction is currently being conducted, several points are clear. Marijuana affects the adrenal function and hormone production in both men and women in a negative manner. This may be important to adults who are marginally fertile or to the developing adolescent. Because of the many unknowns concerning the effects of marijuana on the human fetus, pregnant women should be particularly discouraged from its use.

The physical effects of marijuana include reddish, droopy eyelids, poor balance and coordination, increased pulse rate, temperature and blood pressure, poor concentration, mood elevation

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or giddiness, memory loss, hallucinations, pain relief and more acute hearing. Most of these effects last from two to five hours. Other effects, particularly those concerned with motor coordination, mental acuity and vision, may persist for

more than 24 hours, depending on the dose taken. Because of the manner in which marijuana reacts with the internal chemistry of the body, it produces many of the combined effects of cocaine and heroin.

Psychological effects include acute panic or anxiety reaction, lack of motivation, time distortion, paranoia and delusions. Marijuana is often used in conjunction with alcohol, cocaine, PCP or LSD. These drugs increase some of the psychological effects and reactions. Individuals especially at risk are those suffering from anxiousness or depression, or unrecognized psychotic individuals.

Tolerance to the effects of prolonged use of marijuana is well substantiated. In past years, the term “dependence” has meant a vague desire to continue use, as well as the presence of physical with-



PHONE (916) 344-4789

4817 MYRTLE AVENUE / P.O. BOX 420998
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drawal symptoms when use of the drug is discontinued. Under conditions of heavy use, withdrawal symptoms can occur. They include irritability, restlessness, decreased appetite, vomiting, tremors, sleep disturbance and diarrhea.

The combination of the greater potency of marijuana now available on the street, the increasing youthfulness of users and the greater frequency of use indicates a very different situation in the United States than that which existed a few years ago. The harmless reputation of marijuana usage of the last decade now lacks a basis in fact. Both health professionals and the public need to become aware of and actively deal with these areas of concern. ★

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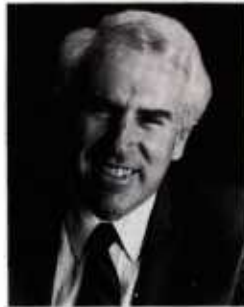


STEPHEN C. MALONEY.
Division President

2020 Hurley Way, Suite 395
Sacramento, CA 95825

(916) 920-0200
FAX (916) 920-0379

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Sacramento, CA 95827-7635
(916) 689-4209 (916) 689-4062