

The Involvement of Marijuana Drivers in Illinois Fatal Motor Vehicle Crashes

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Summary

With no legal marijuana available to the driving public in Illinois in 2014, about 13% of the fatalities involved marijuana high drivers resulting in the death of more than 100 persons. With full implementation of the Medical Marijuana program it is expected that **the percentage in Illinois will rise from 12.6% to 15.6% and increase the yearly number to about 133 fatalities, 26 more than the present level.**

About 56% of the Marijuana drivers were speeding compared to only 39% of drivers with no alcohol or drugs. Marijuana drivers were about 5 years younger than DUI drivers and 40% were also DUI. Further, marijuana is now the No.1 class of drugs found in the blood of fatal drivers in Illinois.

Cook and Madison County had the most marijuana fatal crashes with 7 each, followed by Mc Henry with 6. La Salle and Peoria each had 5 fatal crashes.

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Background

The Illinois's Medical Marijuana program signed into law in 2013, has yet to be fully implemented with only a few dispensaries approved to sell medical marijuana starting in November 2015. Fewer than 5,000 persons have received approval to purchase marijuana from the dispensaries as of January 2016.

The medical cannabis act is designated as a "four-year pilot program," which means that the state legislature and Governor's office will have to re-approve the bill before it expires in 2018

However, data from the National Highway Safety Administration, NHTSA, shows that the presence of marijuana in fatal motor vehicle crashes has already been found and to a surprisingly high degree.

Involvement of Marijuana in Fatal Crashes

Table 1 shows the number and percent of fatalities involving a marijuana driver for the years 2010 to 2014, the most recent data available. A large increase in the number and percent of fatalities marijuana related occurred after 2010. Since only 60% of the drivers in fatal crashes are tested for drugs, the actual number and percentage is likely to be higher. As will be shown in Table 3, the percentage of 12.6%, at ½ the percentage of DUI drivers, is in line with other states where no marijuana is legal.

Table 1. Illinois Drivers in Fatal Crashes with Marihuana, 2010 to 2014, NHTSA FARS Data						
Group	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010 – 14
						(5 yrs)
IL Driver with Marihuana*	21	80	108	96	99	404
Percent Marihuana	3.10%	10.80%	13.40%	12.10%	12.60%	10.60%
Total Fatalities in Vehicle, Driver Mj	24	85	117	102	107	435
ILLINOIS Drivers in Fatal crashes	1311	1246	1322	1346	1274	6499
IL Drivers Drug Tested	681	742	803	792	786	3804
% Drug Tested	51.90%	59.60%	60.70%	58.80%	61.70%	58.50%

Many Illinois Marijuana Drivers Also DUI

Table 2 shows that over 40% of the marijuana drivers are also DUI with a BAC at 0.08% or higher. This is similar to the finding in other states where the marijuana drivers are also mixing marijuana with alcohol well above the impairment level of alcohol. Note also that only 39% of marijuana drivers had no alcohol.

Table 2. IL Drivers in Fatal Crashes with Marihuana and Alcohol, 2014 FARS Data				
Group	Drivers with Marihuana 2014	Mj with BAC .00 (NO Alcohol)	Mj with BAC .01-.07	Mj DUI (BAC .08+)
MJ Fatalities*	107	42	20	45
Drivers with Mj	99	40	18	41
Percent	100%	40.4%	18.7%	41.4%
% Marijuana of Tested Drivers	12.6%	5.1%	2.3%	5.2%

*Fatalities in vehicle of driver only.

Illinois Marijuana Drivers Younger than DUI Drivers

Table 3 shows the median age and the percent of drivers in several age groups for both Illinois marijuana and DUI drivers. A five year median age difference exists between marijuana and DUI drivers, with marijuana drivers younger. The percentages of marijuana drivers under age 25 at 37% and under age 22 at 21% are much larger and quite different than DUI drivers. The differences are statistically and practically different. Marijuana is often called the gateway drug and the Illinois data clearly shows the increased involvement for younger drivers in fatal crashes.

Group	mj drivers	DUI Drivers
Median Age	28	33
% 21 and Under	21.2%	8.0%
% < Age 25	37.4%	19.7%

Marijuana Most Common Drug in Fatal Crashes

As shown in Table 4, marijuana is the No. 1 drug found in the blood of Illinois drivers in fatal crashes at about 37%. The second most prevalent drug is depressants at about 20%.

Drug Type	Number	Percent
Narcotics	46	17.2%
Depressants	53	19.8%
Stimulants	41	15.3%
Hallucinogens	29	10.8%
Marijuana	99	36.9%
Total	268	100.0%

Top Illinois Counties involving Marijuana Drivers in Fatal Crashes

Table 5 shows a brief summary of marijuana drivers by county. The two counties where the most marijuana drivers were located were in Cook (Chicago area) and Madison (East St. Louis area) counties. With 102 Counties in Illinois, most counties either had no marijuana fatalities or just 1 fatality.

Table 5. Top 5 IL Counties with Marijuana Drivers, 2014 FARS Data	
COOK	7
MADISON	7
MC HENRY	6
LA SALLE	5
PEORIA	5
Total Mj Drivers	99

Marijuana Drivers Were Speeding

As shown in Table 6, about 56% of the 99 marijuana drivers in fatal crashes were speeding, compared to only 39% of the drivers in fatal crashes with no alcohol or drugs. This is counter to the commonly held belief that marijuana drivers are more careful and drive slower.

Table 6. Illinois Marijuana Drivers Speeding Compared to Drivers with No Alcohol or Drugs, 2014 FARS Data			
State	Not Speeding	Speeding	Total
Drivers Mj	44	55	99
Percent Speeding	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
Drivers No Alcohol/Drugs	136	88	224
Percent Speeding	60.7%	39.3%	100.0%

Full Implementation of Medical Marijuana will result in Higher of Marijuana Use and Fatalities

Table 7 compares Medical Marijuana and No Legal Marijuana states for percentage of drivers in fatal crashes known to have marijuana in their system. Medical Marijuana states had 24% higher percentage of fatal drivers, with wide state variation. Illinois is now a medical marijuana state but the program had not yet been implemented in 2014.

In fatal crashes there are at least 1 fatality. As noted in Table 7, in the 23 states and D.C. with state-approved Medical Marijuana, there were 1,077 fatalities in the single year 2014 where the drivers had marijuana in their systems (16.3% of total fatalities). In the 27 states with No Legal Marijuana there were 1,437 fatalities in the single year 2014 where the drivers had marijuana in their systems (13.1% of total fatalities).

Full implementation of Medical Marijuana in Illinois will certainly increase the involvement in fatal crashes. Data in Table 7 below shows Medical Marijuana states with a **24% higher percentage**. Using that percentage increase as a guide to what will happen when the program is fully implemented, we expect that **the percentage in Illinois will rise from 12.6% to 15.6% and increase the number of fatalities to about 133, 26 more than the present level.** (For each additional percent of marijuana driver involvement in fatal crashes, about an additional 8.5 lives are lost.)

Table 7, next page

Table 7. Known Percent of Drivers in Fatal Crashes with Marijuana for States with Medical Marijuana vs. States with NO Legal Marijuana, 2014 NHTSA FARS, All Drivers Data

Medical Marijuana States				NO Legal Marijuana States			
State	Tot mj	Drivers	% mj	State	Tot mj	Drivers	% mj
Alaska	21	76	27.6%	Alabama	77	563	13.7%
Arizona	35	368	9.5%	Arkansas	88	435	20.2%
California	307	1634	18.8%	Florida	119	1156	10.3%
Colorado	64	310	20.6%	Georgia	113	647	17.5%
Connecticut	21	120	17.5%	Idaho	11	78	14.1%
Delaware	18	55	32.7%	Indiana	51	502	10.2%
D.C.	2	18	11.1%	Iowa	19	116	16.4%
Hawaii	9	54	16.7%	Kansas	22	206	10.7%
Illinois*	99	786	12.6%	Kentucky	84	497	16.9%
Maine	3	100	3.0%	Louisiana	33	362	9.1%
Maryland	No Data	213	No Data	Mississippi	12	230	5.2%
Massachusetts	27	133	20.3%	Missouri	95	386	24.6%
Michigan	92	490	18.8%	Nebraska	6	63	9.5%
Minnesota	13	190	6.8%	North Carolina	No Data	32	No Data
Montana	29	167	17.4%	North Dakota	3	102	2.9%
Nevada	40	227	17.6%	Ohio	103	664	15.5%
New Hampshire	20	105	19.0%	Oklahoma	23	318	7.2%
New Jersey	47	365	12.9%	Pennsylvania	64	932	6.9%
New Mexico	21	151	13.9%	South Carolina	89	449	19.8%
New York	79	512	15.4%	South Dakota	3	83	3.6%
Oregon	19	110	17.3%	Tennessee	84	644	13.0%
Rhode Island	6	30	20.0%	Texas	182	1263	14.4%
Vermont	8	33	24.2%	Utah	21	195	10.8%
Washington	97	341	28.4%	Virginia	43	374	11.5%
Total	1077	6,588	16.3%	West Virginia	19	186	10.2%
<p align="center">Med mj states 24.4% higher USA Total Mj 14.3%, about 1/2 of DUI level of 30.5%</p>				Wisconsin	59	400	14.8%
				Wyoming	14	89	15.7%
				Total	1437	10,972	13.1%

WA and CO have legal sale for recreational use.

***Illinois medical marijuana program not implemented in 2014, the law was passed in 2013.**

Data for this study from NHTSA Fatal Accident Reporting System (FARS)
<http://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/QueryTool/QuerySection/SelectYear.aspx>