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Group pushes pot initiative

By PAUL FEIST
Of the Emerald

Oregon Marijuana Initiative, a marijuana decriminalization group, announced Tuesday the initiation of a petition to put a measure legalizing possession of marijuana on the Nov. 2, 1982, general election ballot.

The measure reads: "Adults, 18 years and older, shall not be punished criminally, or be denied any right or privilege, or be subject to any permit, license requirement or fine, for their private possession, transportation or cultivation of marijuana

for personal use." The initiative would not, however, affect or supercede any of the federal statutes prohibiting the sale of marijuana.

OMI needs to collect 60,000 signatures of registered voters by July 2, 1982, in order to put the initiative on the November ballot. If a majority of voters approve, the measure becomes law.

"It might be a little late to start this petition drive," says Jerry Beck of the Drug Information Center, which takes no official stand on drug legislation. The wording of initiatives of this type

also presents a lot of problems, Beck says.

"Personal use" is intended to mean a reasonable quantity in an individual's possession, the initiative group says. "There is no definition of reasonable quantity," says April Land, an official with OMI.

"It's important for people to realize that we're not just a bunch of hippies who smoke pot all day long. All we're advocating is personal use," Land says. The present laws concerning marijuana use are outdated and hard to enforce, she says.

"If the measure becomes law

the police will be able to concentrate on more serious crimes, and they will have a better reputation," she says.

David Burks, Lane County sheriff, is "absolutely opposed" to the initiative and says the group's efforts will be unsuccessful.

"A similar initiative was put to the voters of Lane County a few years ago and was defeated," he says.

The rest of the state would vote more conservatively and defeat the decriminalization measure, Burks says.

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