

STUDENTS

PEAK OUT

What did you think of the Drunk Driving Assembly?

Kelsey Bradshaw,
freshman



"I thought it was very intense. It was good to make people aware of what they're dealing with."

Alex Olivier,
sophomore



"It shows how one second everything can be good, and the next second your dead."

Adrianna Silva,
junior



"The assembly was very interesting. I found it very moving. It made me realize that it could actually happen."

James Low,
senior



"It was important to get that information out in the open and let people see the consequences of their actions."

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Legalizing marijuana would reduce harm

RYAN KRELLWITZ

Contributing Writer

The majority of information that has been supplied to teenagers about marijuana and its effects on their bodies is tainted and wrong. The facts and information I present in this article about marijuana were drawn from three books: *Buzzed: The Straight Facts about the Most Used and Abused Drugs from Alcohol to Ecstasy* by Cynthia Kuhn, *Illegal Drugs* by Paul Gahlinger, and *From Chocolate to Morphine: Everything You Need to Know About Mind-Altering Drugs* by Winifred Rosen and Andrew T. Weil.

People have been misinformed and lied to about the true effects of marijuana. For this reason, and various others concerning its positive medical effects, marijuana should not be clumped into the same category of drugs as heroin and ecstasy. These drugs, called "Schedule 1" drugs, are considered by the Drug Enforcement Agency as having a high potential for abuse and no accepted medical uses; marijuana should definitely not be there. Marijuana should be legal for the general public consumption. Before that can happen though, the population must be better informed about this virtually harmless drug.

Before we start separating fact from fiction and understanding marijuana, we must first understand from where all of this misinformation stem. Since the 1950's, the government has invested millions of dollars into anti-marijuana propaganda campaigns. The majority of these campaigns were in no way based on factual information, and had no valid research to back them. To this day, this trend of fabricated "scare tactics" persists, especially in our public school systems. Many websites that contain useful and straightforward information on drugs are blocked by the district web filter.

These scare tactics cause the government to lose most of its credibility when it comes to drugs. Anti-marijuana ads can be quite comical. The attempts by the government in the past 60 years to make drugs less appealing to young people has usually had just the reverse affect.

The most important thing that people must know about marijuana in comparison to legal recreational drugs is that alcohol is much, much worse for you. Alcohol,

the legal drug of choice in most of the western world, causes long term addiction, memory loss and brain damage. It also damages every other part of the body.

Marijuana, on the other hand, has not been proven to be physically addictive (it has been shown to be psychologically and habitually addictive), does not cause any long term memory loss, and is only about as bad for your lungs as cigarettes are. Yet, because a person would probably not smoke the same amount of marijuana cigarettes as regular cigarettes over the same period of time, marijuana smoke may be less harmful. The withdrawals of alcohol can last years after a heavy drinker's last drink, whereas even the heaviest marijuana user suffers from the mildest withdrawal symptoms, which are reported to only last about a week.

One of the widest misconceptions associated with marijuana is the "gateway drug" association. Health teachers may lead you to believe that smoking marijuana leads people to try other, harder drugs, like heroin. This is a preposterous idea. Most people who have smoked pot and either wasted their lives away on the couch or who have become real criminals in the hard drug world probably had a disposition for these things before they started smoking pot. All kinds of people use this drug, and most of them don't turn to heroin "after the buzz of marijuana just doesn't thrill them anymore."

Is marijuana a bad thing to mix with school, though? Studies show that functioning under the influence of marijuana has many negative effects when it comes to learning in general. Concentration, learning, perception and fine muscle skills are impaired. Although these things return to normal after a person comes down from the high with no proven adverse side effects, someone may have trouble recalling certain things from when they were stoned. This is because marijuana affects the part of the brain responsible for creating new memories. Because of this, it is probably not a good idea to try to learn something while under the influence of marijuana, and should be avoided during school for this reason. Unfortunately, many people choose to incorporate this drug into school life.

"I see marijuana more

than any other type of drug here at school," Allister Bunch, School Resource Officer, said.

Those people in our society who support the legalization of marijuana must first take a step in understanding when it is appropriate to use it and when it is not. And the question of legalization is not far off, either, as laws and paradigms continue to shift in our society daily.

"In your lifetime I am willing to bet it will be legalized," Bunch said.

Marijuana prohibition was started for political and moral reasons, but truth and knowledge should prevail. It is up to the people who know the facts to stomp out the ignorance and inaccuracies that surround this drug. The real truths about marijuana should be taught. People should be able to make their own decisions based on correct information, not scare tactics.

Although smoking marijuana, or taking any drug for that matter, is harmful in some way to your health, there are also huge economic benefits to making the drug legal. First, any product that has as large of a demand as marijuana, our society will be bought, no matter what.

Prohibition does little to stamp out the demand for marijuana. In fact, it only creates a black market for it. The same thing happened with alcohol in the beginning of the century. Because of this black market, marijuana is sold with other black market drugs, and is only regulated by the people who grow and deal it.

If the government were to legalize it and supported marijuana as a cash crop, oversaw the sales of it, and taxed it like they do tobacco, the unregulated black market would cease to exist. The government, and in turn the country, would then profit from the \$32 billion that marijuana makes on the black market every year.

This article contains information that can be taken as the truth, or as a complete slander to everything you have ever been taught about marijuana. Conduct your own, unbiased research. Realize that the government does tell lies. Everything you learn in school is not always correct, and adults don't always know as much as they think they do. I urge you to make up your own mind and please, live *your* life and make your own decisions.