

# An Opinion: Ready or Not, Here Comes Legal Marijuana

By Scott Laird

On July 1, 2015 marijuana becomes legal in the state of Oregon, whether the general public, law enforcement or state regulators are ready or not.

In November of 2014 Oregonians approved Measure 91 by an overwhelming 56 to 44 percent margin, legalizing the sale, possession, use and cultivation of recreational marijuana by adults. Oregon becomes just the fourth state to end the prohibition of marijuana, after Colorado, Alaska and our northern neighbor, Washington.

Oregon was also one of the first states to approve the use of medical marijuana way back in 1998, setting the stage for the more widely accepted use of marijuana in general, and helping pave the way for the even more progressive passage of Measure 91.

While the recreational use of marijuana is actually fairly prevalent in our culture, and the legalization may not lead to major visible changes, the shift socially and culturally could be huge. Change is always hard, especially changes backed by laws that make previously illegal actions legal. This is a big transition and will likely be difficult for some people to accept.

So, with legalization just around the corner, here's what Oregonians should know about changes to marijuana laws:

- Under Measure 91 people 21 and older are allowed to possess up to one ounce of marijuana in a public place and up to eight ounces in their home. The law also allows someone to grow up to four marijuana plants per household.
- In addition, anyone 21 and older can possess up to one pound of edible solids, 72 ounces of marijuana-infused liquid, and one ounce of marijuana extract.
- Even after July 1, unless you're an Oregon medical marijuana patient, there's still no way to legally purchase marijuana. The new law gives the Oregon Liquor Control Commission until January 1, 2016 to draft rules and implement regulations for production, processing and selling marijuana.
- The law says persons 21 or older can give away an ounce to someone else who is 21 or older.
- Marijuana consumption can only occur in private and is not allowed in public places.
- Measure 91 does not affect Oregon's medical marijuana laws. Only

cardholders in the medical marijuana program may buy marijuana from state licensed dispensaries.

- It also does not change Oregon employment law. Employers can continue to mandate drug testing and require employees to follow policies for a drug-free workplace.
- It will still be illegal to drive under the influence of marijuana or to be publicly intoxicated.
- Under federal law, you are not legally allowed to transport marijuana across state lines. You are also not allowed to send it through the mail.

In addition to the legal questions, culturally the legalization of recreational marijuana raises several issues.

The City of Vernonia, along with many other small towns across the state, have wrestled with how they might, or might not, regulate distribution of both medical marijuana and the upcoming retail sales. Many people don't want to see a marijuana shop on Bridge Street, with open sales. Others think keeping it out in the open where it can be observed and controlled makes the best sense.

The Vernonia City Council had placed a moratorium on medical marijuana dispensaries that expired on May 1; at their June 1 meeting they declined to place any additional restrictions beyond the state's rule that does not allow them to be sited within 1000 feet of a school. The Council also told staff to reword the city business license, which had previously contained wording prohibiting businesses in violation of federal law. In other words the City Council is following the lead of the voters they represent and we could potentially see a medical marijuana dispensary in downtown in the very near future.

Meanwhile, state law makers continue to debate how they will allow and tax retail sales. In most recent news, the state Marijuana Committee says they are considering a proposal that would allow recreational users to purchase limited amounts of marijuana at medical marijuana dispensaries starting October 1 of this year. They are also discussing a 20% sales tax on retail sales. Those discussions are continuing as of this writing. The OLCC says it won't be ready to allow retail establishments to open until the second half of 2016.

Many marijuana advocates see legalization as a much needed

step towards the end of the "War on Drugs" which for years has imprisoned nonviolent offenders with long sentences nationwide. This long running battle is seen by many as a waste of time and resources that has ruined lives and wrecked families, for what some consider a harmless and natural herb. Many people say it should be regulated and taxed, like alcohol or cigarettes and become a revenue generator for the state, which is exactly what Oregon is moving towards.

Several countries around the world have either outright legalized drug possession, have decriminalized it, or are moving towards that goal with mixed but mostly positive results. Most notable is Portugal along with several Central and South American countries including Costa Rica and Ecuador.

Allowing adults to make life decisions for themselves makes sense but also comes with consequences. As many gun owners like to say, "Freedom is not free." Like other freedoms that Oregonians enjoy, the freedom to consume marijuana will have some costs.

Many Oregonians already use marijuana, probably many more than we might suspect. Since the state voted in favor of legalization, there appears to be a willingness of people to talk openly about their past and current pot consumption. The stigma has been removed and people seem much more open discussing a topic that had previously been taboo in certain situations.

Although marijuana use will be legal only for adults over the age of 21, the message that legalization sends to our youth should be a concern for all of us. While adults now have the choice to smoke pot legally in their homes and carry it on their person without fear of penalty, I have to wonder about the impact this could have on children. Will access to marijuana increase and will the desire to experiment become more tempting? Marijuana use among middle and high school students is already higher than it should be. Marijuana use is known to impair brain development in children. A local high school student recently posted on Facebook her concerns about how legalized marijuana could negatively impact her generation and I think this is a legitimate concern.

I have a theory about marijuana

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use. Some people who use marijuana are wound just a little tighter than most people and smoking pot brings them down to a normal level, where they are able to function pretty well on a daily basis. For other people, just a few hits slows them down and makes them effectively dumber. Some people enjoy the way pot transforms their thinking and expands their mind. In other words, it effects people differently.

While regular marijuana use can lead to apathy, laziness, and unproductiveness, so can over eating, alcohol consumption, watching too much television or playing too many video games. Many people safely use marijuana as a way to relax and recreate. It's now just one more vice

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