

Washington Prepares for Marijuana Retail Sales in July

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Washington state Patrol Chief John Batiste, center, speaks to the media about public awareness and safety efforts the state is making in advance of the start of retail sales of recreational marijuana, on Tuesday, June 24, 2014 in Olympia, Wash. Batiste says troopers are trained to recognize stoned drivers. (AP Photo/Rachel La Corte)

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — As Washington state prepares to issue the first licenses for marijuana retail stores, Gov. Jay Inslee and other state leaders on Tuesday announced a coordinated campaign to make sure pot stays out of the hands of minors once products start hitting store shelves next month.

"Those who have led the effort to legalize this product understand that we've got to make sure that parents' roles are respected and emphasized and that the health of our children is of our paramount concern," Inslee said. Different state agencies are working together "to make sure the public has the information they need to make healthy decisions and the tools that they need to keep our kids safe," he said.

The Liquor Control Board will issue about 20 retail licenses on July 7, and the stores that are ready can open the next day. More stores will get licensed in the following days.

During Tuesday's news conference, officials with the state Liquor Control Board, which has been overseeing the implementation of the state's recreational marijuana law, said that they are poised to adopt emergency rules Wednesday to do three things concerning edible marijuana: require all marijuana-infused products to be labeled clearly as containing marijuana; require all products to be scored in such a way that a serving size is easily identified by the consumer; and requiring marijuana-infused products to be approved by the board before sale.

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Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

Previously adopted rules already require marijuana-infused products to be stored behind a counter or other barrier, and to be child-resistant. Officials stressed that no product will be approved if it has a label that is appealing to kids.

"We're just not going to let toys or cartoon figures be used on our labels," said Sharon Foster, chairwoman of the state liquor control board.

Foster noted that officials are also worried about adult consumers who may not realize the impact of varying products. "The marijuana today is not the marijuana of the 60s," she said.

Edibles won't be available right away once stores open because a commercial kitchen is required, and, so far, no processors with commercial kitchens have been licensed.

The state has launched a \$400,000 statewide radio and online campaign by the Department of Health this week that urges parents to talk with their children about the health risks of using marijuana. The Washington Traffic Safety Commission also launched a "Drive High, Get a DUI" campaign.

"We are not going to allow this effort of legalization to increase the risks of our family members on the roadways," Inslee said.

State Patrol Chief John Batiste said that troopers have been trained to recognize signs of stoned driving.

"We've been dealing with this for a long time," he said. "We just simply ask that with access, that people are responsible."

At the end of 2012, Washington and Colorado became the first states to legalize possession of recreational marijuana by adults 21 and older. The voters also called for the establishment of systems of state-licensed pot growers, processors and retail stores.

Sales have already begun in Colorado.

Source URL (retrieved on 04/25/2015 - 3:11pm):

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