



Blogs

Drugged driving campaign targets medical marijuana patients who drive stoned

By Michael Roberts

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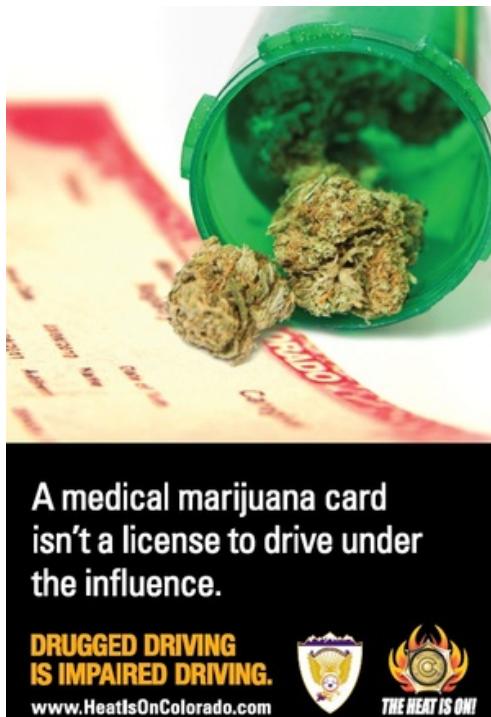
Update below: Against the backdrop of the [Westminster Police's drug enforcement checkpoint](#) and a ten-year [reckless homicide sentence for "self-medicating" Joshua Wittig](#), the Colorado Department of Transportation is today launching a [drugged-driving campaign](#). And a CDOT spokeswoman says that while all impairing drugs will be in the spotlight, medical marijuana is a special focus.

"The Heat Is On campaign is our high-visibility DUI enforcement campaign," notes Heather Halpape, CDOT's public-relations manager for safety programs. "This is an extension of that. We've concentrated on alcohol for so long, but we think it's time to make people aware that drugs also impair your ability to drive. And we're not just talking about illegal drugs, but also sleeping pills and prescription medicine that may impair your ability to drive safely, especially if drivers combine them with a glass of wine or something like that."

The rise of Colorado's medical marijuana industry was also an inspiration for the campaign, Halpape confirms.

"Of course, it's a wider issue," she acknowledges. "But I think the prominence of medical marijuana, and how common it is, was also a factor. We hear anecdotally from law enforcement that they're seeing a lot more drivers under the influence of cannabis. We don't know if it's medical marijuana or not, but law enforcement agencies tell us that

when they pull someone over, a driver will often show them their registry card, as if that's an excuse."



The posters designed for dispensaries.

She points out that Colorado police agencies increasingly include "officers specially trained to recognize signs of impairment. They're called drug-recognition experts, and they have lots of different ways to determine what category of drugs people are under. But for some reason, there's a disconnect" with medical marijuana patients. "They think that because they have a card, they can drive under the influence of marijuana. So we need to educate patients -- let them know that just because you have a card doesn't mean you can drive under the influence of cannabis. Medical marijuana is legal, but beer is legal, too, and that doesn't mean you can drink and drive. And a lot of drivers truly believe they should be let go scot free because they have their registry card."

Such issues cropped up during the most recent legislative session, when Representative Claire Levy sponsored a [bill to establish THC driving standard](#). But the measure was ultimately [put on hold](#) shortly after a blood test on *Westword* medical marijuana reviewer William Breathes showed that he was still at [nearly triple the proposed limit when sober](#), owing to the way cannabis' active ingredients linger in the system.

The [Medical Marijuana Industry group supported the concept of Levy's legislation](#), with executive director Michael Elliott telling us this past March that "we want to do everything we can to make sure our patients are safe drivers, and we share that concern with the sponsors of the bill." It's no surprise, then, that MMIG has been working with CDOT on the drugged-driving campaign.

"We're partnering with the Medical Marijuana Industry Group. We've met with Michael Elliott several times, and they're going to help us distribute posters to medical marijuana centers," Halpape reveals. "And we're also going to provide posters to pharmacies that focus more on prescription medicine, encouraging people to ask their pharmacists and doctors how their medication might affect their ability to drive safely."

The PR doesn't stop there. CDOT is also purchasing billboard space -- some placards are already on view in the Denver area -- in addition to bus ads and gas-pump toppers. Radio spots are part of the mix, too. Links to the latter can be accessed by [clicking here](#).

Halpape thinks the Drugged Driving campaign may be the first of its kind. "I believe some states have done campaigns about prescription medications," she says, "but I'm not aware of one doing a lot with drugged driving, and specifically medical marijuana. We may be the first to have a campaign like this."

Update, 1:06 p.m. August 19: The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office reports that a mobile billboard to be used at today's press conference announcing the Drugged Driving campaign was apparently stolen the evening before from a location near West Chatfield Avenue and South Garrison Street. The sign measures eight-feet tall by twenty-feet wide and was bolted to a twenty-foot flatbed trailer.

As for the design, the billboard duplicates the last image below. Page down to see it and other Drugged Driving posters -- and if you have any information about the theft, phone the Jeffco tip line at 303-271-5612.

**You can't hide driving
under the influence
of cannabis.**

Drug Recognition Experts
are trained to spot the signs.

**DRUGGED DRIVING
IS IMPAIRED DRIVING.**



THE HEAT IS ON!

www.HeatIsOnColorado.com



**⚠ WARNING: Driving while medicated
can result in an arrest.**

Ask your doctor or pharmacist how your
prescription may impact your ability to drive.

**DRUGGED DRIVING
IS IMPAIRED DRIVING.**



THE HEAT IS ON!

www.HeatIsOnColorado.com

The Rx For DUI.

**⚠ WARNING: Driving while medicated
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http://blogs.westword.com/latestword/2011/08/drugged_driving_campaign_medical_marijuana_patients.php