

Why Buzzed Driving Is Not Drunk Driving

Army study found no impairment

by George Trinkaus

If you reside in a state where marijuana has been made legal, you are a target for the buzzed-driving-is-drunk-driving campaign.

This propaganda is conducted by government agencies like the Oregon Department of Transportation and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The preferred medium is radio spots which, like the alcohol DUI campaign, threaten the violator with punishments that could bankrupt his life: thousands in lawyer fees and fines, suspended license, probation, and even jail time. The commercials (free public-service spots blessed by a gatekeeper called the Ad Council) equate the driving impacts of pot with those of alcohol one-to-one.

The dope-DUI campaign not only contradicts every doper's own experience, it also contradicts a scientific study conducted by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War.

Circa 1969, the draft caught up with my doctor friend, George, who was yanked out of his New York residency in psychiatry and sent to Fort Dietrich, where he joined a team of Army doctors in a study to determine the impairment of soldier-drivers under the influence of marijuana. Curious, I asked for reports, which Dr. George (his last name, for the record, was Leib) freely shared, for the project apparently was not classified.

The marijuana, he said, was administered in the form of white THC tablets, which enabled precise dosing and also facilitated the use of placebos for control subjects.

Soldier subjects drove jeeps, as well as more difficult equipment, like tanks, over a challenging course, while doctors like George measured such factors as reaction time, judgment, tracking,

coordination, attention, and perception. The results? No impairment was found. In fact, a few subjects showed an improvement in skills.

The buzzed-driving campaign equates pot with alcohol, one-to-one with no qualifications. So, If pot equals alcohol, then what are the equations? A half-gram joint equals what exactly? Three pints of beer, four ounces of wine, one martini?

But the state of Washington dares to set a precise blood-level standard limit: five nanograms of THC per milliliter. Nanograms? That's sensitive testing at trace levels. Nevertheless, as with alcohol, and police can stop a driver and demand a blood test. Does the Washington drive have to wander all over the road to get pulled over? Hardly. Police are instructed to look for "subtle signs." How does any of this hold up in court? (Oregon so far has wisely abstained from such a limit.)

Where did Washington get its data? Where do he buzzed-driving campaigners get their science? Has any pot advocacy group bothered to challenge their assertions?

Is the DUI really a scapegoat for an inherently dangerous transportation system? Is it a racket for local governments and lawyers? Has the DUI become such a sacred institution that no one dare question its foundations? Perhaps the alcohol DUI and its standards are based on a science as shaky as the pot version. In recent years, Oregon reset its alcohol standard from .012 to .08. Is this supported by any science, or is it another tightening of the DUI dragnet and a revenue booster?

DUI's move into pot shows how smug the institution has become. It's time to question the authority of the sacrosanct DUI.

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