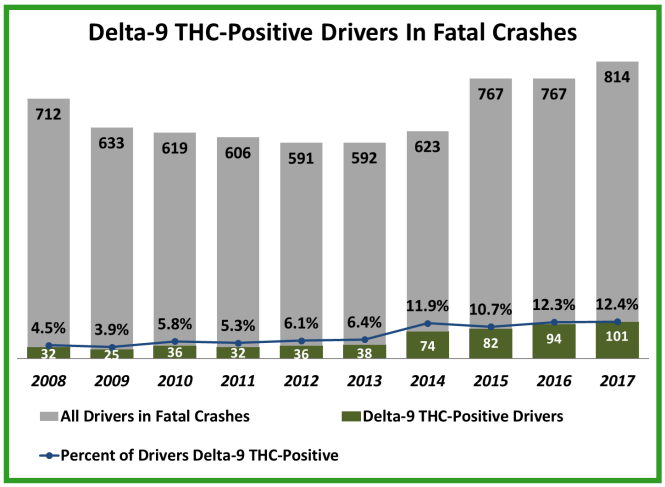
WASHINGTON Traffic Safety COMMISSION

Brief No. 5
May 2019

Cannabis Involvement Among Drivers in Fatal Crashes

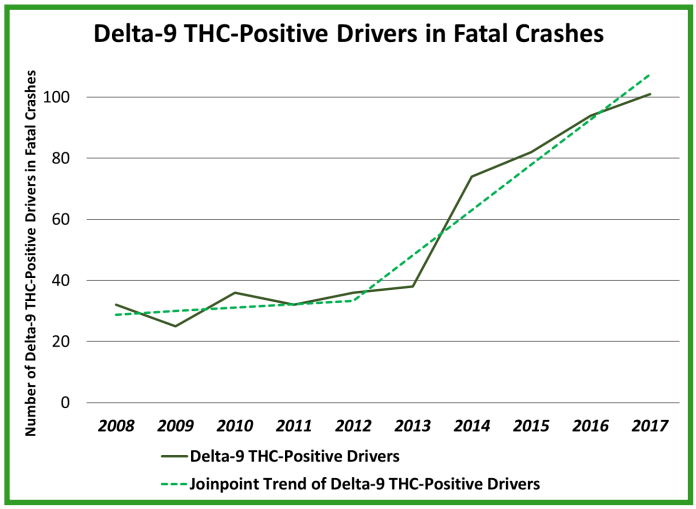
Trends show a steady upward climb in fatal crashes involving drivers testing positive for delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive and impairing chemical in cannabis. The number of drivers positive for delta-9 THC has more than doubled since 2013 and now comprises about 12% of all drivers involved in fatal crashes. There was also a decrease in driver testing rates during this same timeframe; from 63% of drivers tested in 2013 down to less than 50% in 2017. Nearly three-quarters of delta-9 THC-positive drivers in fatal crashes were also positive for other drugs and/or alcohol.



Did you know?

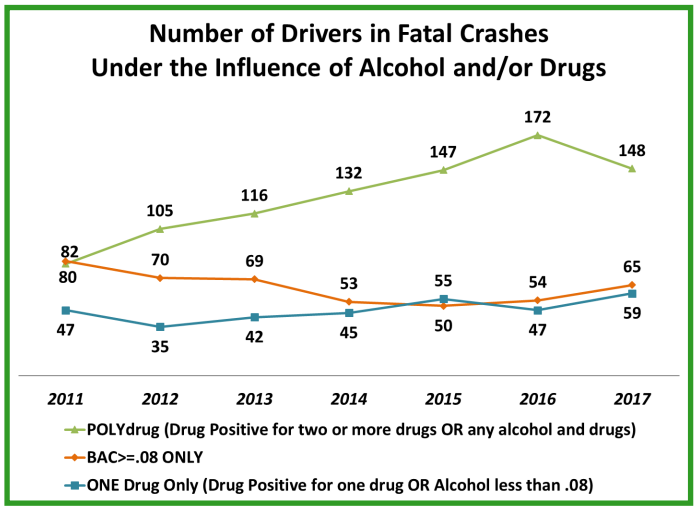
- ⇒ More than half of drivers in fatal crashes positive for delta-9 THC were also positive for alcohol. Most (84%) of these drivers had a BAC greater than 0.08.
- ⇒ Cannabis and alcohol is the most common combination of poly-drugs among drivers in fatal crashes. One of every four poly-drug drivers in fatal crashes were positive for both delta-9 THC and alcohol.
- ⇒ One-third of drivers in fatal crashes positive for delta-9 THC were between the ages of 18 and 25.
- ⇒ The majority (84%) of delta-9 THC-positive drivers in fatal crashes were male.
- ⇒ Overall, alcohol is three times more prevalent among drivers in fatal crashes than delta-9 THC.

I care, because 597 people died in Washington during the years of 2008-2017 in crashes involving delta-9 THC-positive drivers, which was about 12% of all traffic deaths.



The majority of Delta-9 THC-positive drivers in fatal crashes were also positive for other drugs and/or alcohol.

Poly-Drug Drivers are now the most common type of impaired driver involved in fatal crashes. For the first time in 2012, drivers who had consumed multiple drugs became more prevalent than fatal crash-involved drivers who had consumed only alcohol. This gap continues to grow.



Data Sources:

Washington Fatality Analysis Reporting System (WA-FARS), *Washington Traffic Safety Commission*

Toxicology Reports, *Washington State Patrol*

For more information, *please contact Washington Traffic Safety Commission, Research and Data Division at (360) 725-9860.*
https://wtsc.wa.gov/research-data/

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Drivers in Fatal Crashes	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	TOTAL
Total Drivers in Fatal Crashes	712	633	619	606	591	592	623	767	767	814	6,724
Drivers Who Were Tested For Drugs	404	369	378	344	345	373	343	396	419	395	3,766
Drivers Who Were NOT Tested For Drugs	299	228	217	222	223	210	276	368	347	400	2,790
Driver Drug Testing Unknown	6	36	24	40	23	6	4	2	1	19	161
Percent of Drivers Tested for Drugs	*56.7%*	*58.3%*	*61.1%*	*56.8%*	*58.4%*	*63.0%*	*55.1%*	*51.6%*	*54.6%*	*48.5%*	*56.0%*
Drivers Positive for Any Cannabis	74	78	81	56	63	59	88	92	109	113	813
Percent of Tested Drivers Who Were Cannabis-Positive	*18.3%*	*21.1%*	*21.4%*	*16.3%*	*18.3%*	*15.8%*	*25.7%*	*23.2%*	*26.0%*	*28.6%*	*21.6%*
Percent of Total Drivers Who Were Cannabis-Positive	*10.4%*	*12.3%*	*13.1%*	*9.2%*	*10.7%*	*10.0%*	*14.1%*	*12.0%*	*14.2%*	*13.9%*	*12.1%*
Drivers Positive For Delta-9 THC	32	25	36	32	36	38	74	82	94	101	550
Percent of Tested Drivers Who Were Delta-9 THC-Positive	*7.9%*	*6.8%*	*9.5%*	*9.3%*	*10.4%*	*10.2%*	*21.6%*	*20.7%*	*22.4%*	*25.6%*	*14.6%*
Percent of Total Drivers Who Were Delta-9 THC-Positive	*4.5%*	*3.9%*	*5.8%*	*5.3%*	*6.1%*	*6.4%*	*11.9%*	*10.7%*	*12.3%*	*12.4%*	*8.2%*
Cannabis Metabolite-positive (no Delta-9 THC)	42	53	45	24	27	21	14	10	15	12	263
Percent of Cannabis-Positive Drivers Who Were Delta-9 THC-Positive	*43.2%*	*32.1%*	*44.4%*	*57.1%*	*57.1%*	*64.4%*	*84.1%*	*89.1%*	*86.2%*	*89.4%*	*67.7%*
Delta-9 THC Under <5ng/ml	10	7	12	13	12	18	36	36	46	39	229
Delta-9 THC Over >5ng/ml	22	18	24	19	23	19	38	42	44	59	308
Delta-9 THC Level Unknown	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4	4	3	13
Delta-9 THC & Alcohol ≥ .08	17	17	18	21	14	19	28	37	41	42	254
Percent Delta-9 THC & Alcohol ≥ .08	*53.1%*	*68.0%*	*50.0%*	*65.6%*	*38.9%*	*50.0%*	*37.8%*	*45.1%*	*43.6%*	*41.6%*	*46.2%*
Delta-9 THC & Alcohol ≤ .079	5	2	3	1	1	5	9	9	4	11	50
Percent Delta-9 THC & Alcohol ≤ .079	*15.6%*	*8.0%*	*8.3%*	*3.1%*	*2.8%*	*13.2%*	*12.2%*	*11.0%*	*4.3%*	*10.9%*	*9.1%*
Delta-9 THC & Any Alcohol	22	19	21	22	15	24	37	46	45	53	304
Percent Delta-9 THC & Any Alcohol	*68.8%*	*76.0%*	*58.3%*	*68.8%*	*41.7%*	*63.2%*	*50.0%*	*56.1%*	*47.9%*	*52.5%*	*55.3%*
Delta-9 THC & Other Drugs	10	5	8	8	11	11	27	27	36	30	173
Percent Delta-9 THC & Other Drugs	*31.3%*	*20.0%*	*22.2%*	*25.0%*	*30.6%*	*28.9%*	*36.5%*	*32.9%*	*38.3%*	*29.7%*	*31.5%*
Delta-9 THC ONLY	7	5	9	7	13	8	19	24	28	31	151
Delta-9 THC & Other Alcohol or Drugs	25	20	27	25	23	30	55	58	66	70	399
Percent Delta-9 THC & Other Alcohol or Drugs	*78.1%*	*80.0%*	*75.0%*	*78.1%*	*63.9%*	*78.9%*	*74.3%*	*70.7%*	*70.2%*	*69.3%*	*72.5%*

Data Sources:

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