

Marijuana may seem harmless because it's just leaves

Marijuana is a mixture of the dried and shredded leaves, stems, seeds and flowers of the hemp plant. The mixture can be green, brown, or gray. Hemp's scientific name is Cannabis sativa.

A bunch of leaves seems harmless, right? But think again. Marijuana has a chemical in it called tetrahydrocannabinol. Better known as THC. A lot of other chemicals are found in marijuana too—about 400 of them, some of which can cause lung cancer. But THC is the main active ingredient.

There are more than 200 slang terms for marijuana from city to city and from neighborhood to neighborhood. Some common names are pot, grass, herb, weed, Mary Jane, reefer, skunk, boom, gangster, kif, chronic and ganja.

Cattlemen question new bill

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Kansas cattlemen may soon have to start identifying and keeping records for the stats on each cow in their herds if a proposed law passes in the Kansas Legislature.

House Bill 2593 would require all cattle in the state to be identified, to help with the tracking and eradication of disease. The bill has passed the House and is set for hearings in the Senate.

Mike Schultz, chief executive officer of the Kansas Cattlemen's Association in Brewster, said the association opposes the measure.

"We are not in agreeance with that bill the way it is written," he said. "It's a big issue."

Schultz said the groups agrees that tagging and tracking livestock would be to help in eradicating disease. In the case of an outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad cow disease, the animal could be tracked back to its origin quickly by investigators instead of having to follow a paper trail.

The federal government, he said, is working on a plan for livestock identification but hasn't yet written its guidelines or even suggested how it can be done.

He said a visual marker like an ear tag or clip would be the best way to identify cattle. Some vaccines require issuance of a tag by a veterinarian which has to remain on them until the animal is slaughtered, then the tag is turned in.

Kansas' tag number is 48, and Schultz said he would like to see that incorporated if cattle do have to be identified. He said it would help simplify the process and people would know immediately if an animal was from Kansas. Kansas has 12.8 million of the estimated 95 million head of cattle in this country.

Another issue is country of origin labeling. Schultz said the association is in support labeling livestock and boxed beef

"We are at an opportune time to take advantage of country of origin labeling," he said. "We cannot afford the risk of that disease in the U.S."

He said restrictions on cattle imports have helped with the problem. Imports of cattle over the age of 30 months have been banned to help lessen the possibility that an American herd would become infected.

"You have to limit access," Schultz said. "That's something people accept."

Most of the beef people eat in the U.S. is between the ages of 12 to 16 months, he said.

matters of record

District Traffic

Feb. 18 — Mary Brady, 51, Goodland, was fined \$80 for no child restraint and \$10 for no seat belt.

Feb. 20 — Retha P. Shaw, 49, Atlanta, Ga., was fined \$285 for speeding, 103/70.

Tallie Baldwin, 49, Denver, was fined \$435 for speeding, 113/70.

Andrew M. Naylor, 19, Springlake, N.C., was fined \$300 for speeding, 104/70.

Mallory A. Dumbra, 19, Los Angeles, was fined \$240 for failure to yield to an emergency vehicle.

Lee M. Ayers, 40, Goodland, was fined \$120 for failure to display current tag.

Norman Joseph Doiron, 36, of Commerce City, Colo., was fined \$120 for expired registration.



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Marijuana is used in many ways. Some users brew it as tea or mix it with food. Others smoke blunts — cigars hollowed out and filled with the drug. And sometimes marijuana is smoked through a water pipe called a bong. The most common method is smoking loose marijuana rolled into a cigarette called a joint or nail.

Ever heard that lame line "everybody's doing it?" Tell that person to check the facts. As part of a 2002 National Institute on Drug Abuse-funded study, researchers asked teens if they had used marijuana or hashish (another form of

graders had used the drug in the past month; and just 21.5 percent of 12th graders had.

Under the influence of marijuana, you could forget your best friend's phone number, watch your grade point average drop like a stone or get into a car accident.

Even worse, high doses of marijuana use can cause anxiety and panic attacks. For some people, smoking marijuana makes them feel good. Within minutes of inhaling, a user begins to feel "high," or filled with pleasant sensations. A chemical in marijuana, THC, triggers brain cells to release the chemi-

cal dopamine. Dopamine creates good feelings — for a short time.

Once dopamine starts flowing, a user feels the urge to smoke marijuana again, and then again, and then again. Repeated use could lead to addiction, and addiction is a brain disease.

THC is up to no good in the brain. It finds brain cells, or neurons, with specific kinds of receptors called cannabinoid receptors. Then, it binds to these receptors. When it attaches to a neuron, THC interferes with normal communication between neurons.

Think of it as a disruption in the phone service, caused perhaps by too many users all at once. Let's say Neuron no. 1 needs to tell Neuron no. 2 to create a new memory. If THC is in the mix, this communication is likely to fail.

Certain parts of the brain have high concentrations of cannabinoid receptors. These areas are the hip-

pocampus, the cerebellum, the basal ganglia and the cerebral cortex.

The hippocampus is a part of the brain with a funny name and a big job. It's in charge of certain types of learning and memory. Disrupting the normal functioning of the hippocampus can lead to trouble studying and learning and problems recalling recent events.

The difficulty can be a lot more serious than "Did I take out the trash this morning?" Interference with the hippocampus may also lead to lasting memory loss.

Studies in rats show that taking in a lot of THC over a long period of time can damage neurons in the hippocampus. Chances are, if it happens to rats, it's happening to people who smoke marijuana.

THC, the main active ingredient in marijuana, produces effects that potentially can be useful for treating a variety of medical conditions.

It is the main ingredient in a pill that is currently used to treat nausea in cancer chemotherapy patients and to stimulate appetite in patients with wasting due to AIDS. Scientists are continuing to investigate other potential medical uses for cannabinoids.

However, smoking marijuana is difficult to justify medically because the amount of THC in marijuana is not always consistent. It would be difficult—if not impossible—to come up with a safe and effective use of the drug because you could never be sure how much THC you were getting.

Moreover, the negative effects of marijuana smoke on the lungs will offset the helpfulness of smoked marijuana for some patients.

Finally, little is known about the many chemicals besides THC that are in marijuana, or their possible negative impact on patients with medical conditions.

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Mitchell Woltersdorf, Ph.D., Neuropsychologist
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Ty Schwertfeger, M.D., Neurologist
John B. Terry, M.D., Neurointensivist
Kumar Reddy, M.D., Neurovascular Radiology
Leslie Smith, A.R.N.P.

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