

CANNABIS ESTABLISHMENTS AND NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME

Cannabis businesses do not appear to increase crime in their surrounding neighborhoods

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Cannabis industry locations are not a significant target for crime

In a January 2016 presentation, Lieutenant James Henning of the Denver Police Department (DPD) reported that crimes targeting cannabis industry locations comprised approximately .03% of all crime in Denver from 2013 through 2015.¹ An overwhelming majority of the relatively few crimes committed against licensed facilities annually are non-violent property crimes, whereas “violent crime (including robbery and assault) against licensed facilities is still very uncommon.”² In 2015, there were a total of three reported robberies at cannabis industry locations, which is few considering the 450+ unique dispensary locations in Denver. Though crime has reportedly risen in Colorado steadily over several years, the rise cannot be attributed to crimes against or involving cannabis businesses.

Reports from other legal marijuana states are similar. In the early phases of recreational legalization, Portland Police Department was concerned that dispensaries would be underbanked and cash intensive, and therefore prime targets for armed robbery. According to Police Sgt. Pete Simpson, “it really hasn’t come to fruition that way.”³

“I don’t think the data really supports [dispensaries] are more likely to be targeted at this point.”

Colorado Springs Sgt. Darrin Abbink⁴

“Banks are more likely to get robbed than medical marijuana dispensaries.”

Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck⁵

Studies suggest cannabis dispensaries do not increase crime

In a mid-2015 presentation to state and city officials, student researchers from Metro State University in Denver reported no significant increase in crime trends after retail marijuana stores began operating in January of the previous year, and were unable to establish a link between legal cannabis operations and particular types of criminal activity.⁶ A study published in 2012 found that “the density of medical marijuana dispensaries may not be associated with crime rates or that other factors, such as measures dispensaries take to reduce crime (i.e., doormen, video cameras), may increase guardianship such that it deters possible motivated offenders.”⁷

Studies suggest cannabis policy shifts do not result in increased crime

Furthermore, cannabis policy shifts have not been demonstrated to negatively impact crime. A CATO Institute analysis of cannabis policy shifts in Colorado found no significant change in murder, aggravated assault, robbery, and burglary in Denver after commercialization in 2009, legalization adoption in 2012, or full implementation of legalization in 2014.⁸ In a 2016 study of 11 western medical cannabis states, researchers found medical cannabis laws to have no negative effect on violent or property crime, and in fact to be associated with significant drops in rates of violent crime.⁹

¹ Lt. J. Henning. “Extension of the Transition Phase and Moratorium for Marijuana Licensing,” *Special Issues Committee Presentation*. Jan 11, 2016.

² *Ibid.*

³ “Police Say Marijuana Dispensaries Aren’t Big Targets For Thieves,” Oregon Public Radio, August 4, 2016. <http://www.opb.org/news/article/marijuana-dispensaries-oregon-cash-theft-target/>

⁴ “Marijuana shops not magnets for crime, police say,” Fort Collins Gazette, September 14, 2010. <http://www.gazette.com/articles/wall-104598-marijuana-brassfield.html>.

⁵ “LAPD Chief: Pot clinics not plagued by crime,” Los Angeles Daily News, January 17, 2010. http://www.dailynews.com/news/ci_14206441.

⁶ Community Impact Research, Metro State University. “Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado,” presented June 2015.

⁷ N.J. Kepple, B. Freisthler. “Exploring the Ecological Association Between Crime and Medical Marijuana Dispensaries,” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, Jul 2012; 73(4): 523–530. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

⁸ J. Miron. “Marijuana Policy in Colorado.” *CATO Institute Working Paper*. Oct. 23, 2014.

⁹ E. M. Shepard, P. R. Blackley. “Medical Marijuana and Crime: Further Evidence From the Western States,” *Journal of Drug Issues*. Forthcoming April 2016.