

the **RED CUP** Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q How many people die from smoking weed (illegal) vs. drinking alcohol (legal)?

A. As you might expect, far more people die from alcohol-related causes than those associated with marijuana. Alcohol, however, is also more widely used, as well as being legal for individuals 21 and over. Marijuana, while still an illicit drug under federal law, has been legalized for medicinal purposes by 16 states, including Arizona, in 2010.

Finding a concrete number for annual deaths linked to cannabis is difficult. This is likely due to two factors: 1) Marijuana use, by itself, is not a significant cause of death, and 2) Research on the topic is lacking and not widely reported. As advocates for its legalization often cite, deaths attributable to marijuana are uncommon, and overdoses are either extremely rare or nonexistent due to its low toxicity, compared to alcohol.

Alcohol-related deaths, on the other hand, are very well documented as a leading cause of death among an otherwise relatively healthy 18-25 year old age range, including college students. Each year, it's estimated that alcohol will be responsible for around 79,000 deaths in the United States alone, which take the form of alcohol poisoning, liver disease, cirrhosis, accidents/injuries, homicide, suicide, and motor vehicle fatalities, among others.

There are, of course, other consequences to consider when it comes to marijuana, alcohol or any other drug. While marijuana is not the diabolical drug portrayed in *Reefer Madness* propaganda, it can still make you anxious, affect your memory and motor skills, and drain your motivation. And whatever your views on legalization, a drug possession charge can make the difference between your dream job and another line of work, or affect your chances of receiving financial aid and going on to grad school.

The take home message? Alcohol and marijuana are different drugs that pose different risks, but there are things they share: their impact on health is influenced by how they are used, how often, and by whom.



wildfact

What do oats, lettuce, rice, and cannabis have in common? All share the Latin species name "sativa," meaning "useful."



Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



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