

PRESS RELEASE

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SO WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT MARIJUANA?

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JACKSON (February 19, 2008) – Is marijuana use in Jackson County really an issue? The Jackson County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition thinks so. During the past year, local media headlines have showcased marijuana-related stories including city council members' possession, numerous arrests, and trafficking throughout the county and state.

So what is the big deal? By the time Jackson County youth have reached the 12th grade, almost 44% of them have used marijuana.¹ Marijuana commonly known as "pot" is often referred to as a gateway drug because surveys show that regular marijuana users are more likely to experiment with other drugs. A recent study found that regular users typically combine the use of pot with alcohol, which is more hazardous than the use of either marijuana or alcohol alone.

According to the 2006 Jackson City Police Department statistics, 323, or 47%, of their narcotic and drug arrests were for marijuana. These numbers do not include another 234 arrests for narcotic equipment many of which could also be related to marijuana use. "In addition to the arrests for the drugs, we frequently investigate crimes such as robbery, burglary, and larceny that support drug habits", says Sergeant Rob Jenks of the Jackson Police Department, "many crimes are connected to drugs."

Marijuana is referred to as a Schedule I drug and is illegal to grow, sell, buy or use in any form. It contains several psychoactive chemicals that act on the brain. According to researchers in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, new studies confirm that heavy (daily) marijuana use impairs critical skills related to attention, memory and learning. These deficits persisted up to 24 hours after the user stopped feeling high.

Marijuana also has negative health consequences for Jackson County residents. Daily use of one to three marijuana cigarettes ("joints") produces the same lung damage and cancer risk as *smoking five times as many nicotine cigarettes*. Physical dependence and withdrawal symptoms have been demonstrated with heavy daily use of marijuana. "Many people want to argue for the legalization of marijuana," says Barbara O'Connor, Program Manager for Bridgeway Center of Foote Hospital, "But every day, we see individuals entering substance abuse treatment who are both psychologically and physically dependent on this drug and who have struggled, for years, to abstain from pot." Other physical problems associated with marijuana use include: toxicity in unborn babies, lower levels of testosterone and defective or nonfunctional sperm in male marijuana users, increased heart rate, and lung function problems.

In other words, marijuana has negative consequences to our community. It affects individual's health, community services, and safety of our residents.

More information about:

- *Jackson County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition* and its activities, please contact Kelsey Winston at (517) 796-5133 or via email at kwinston@uwjackson.org

¹ 2006 Prevention Needs Assessment