



Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

Safety and security for all Canadians through innovative police leadership

**Media Conference:
Police readiness for the legalization of
cannabis**

**by
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CACP President**

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Good morning.

Two days from now, on October 17th, the use of recreational cannabis will be legal in Canada. This follows two years of consultation and discussion on bill C-45, the Cannabis Act, and bill C-46 with regard to impaired driving.

One question that has been asked consistently since the legislation was first introduced is: will the police be ready?

As President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, I'm here to tell Canadians that police agencies are ready.

It is important for the public to have a clear understanding of the upcoming changes and what to expect from police services across the country on October 17th.

First, it's important to remember that while the legal recreational use of cannabis will be new for Canadians come Wednesday, enforcing laws around impaired driving and the illegal production, distribution and consumption of cannabis will not be new to police. We have been dealing with drug-impaired driving for many, many decades.

Second, applying the new laws and regulations will involve a concerted approach between various public safety and law enforcement agencies. There are federal, provincial, and municipal laws and regulations that may require action by different public agencies. For example, issues related to public consumption are likely to be addressed by by-law officers, similar to tobacco-related smoking offences; while impaired driving may be addressed by your local or provincial police service, depending on where you live or travel. It's important that the public be aware that different infractions may involve different agencies and different response times, depending on the risk to public safety.

Third, not all issues or concerns related to the legalization of cannabis can or will be resolved on day one or in one day. Police will continue to respond to emergencies and imminent public safety issues, but enforcing the new laws and regulations will be an ongoing process involving a phased approach over weeks, months, and years. The police are ready to adapt based on experience, lessons learned, and the actual reality in each of our communities.

Fourth, keep in mind that the enforcement of new cannabis laws is not the only public safety issue for police agencies in Canada. Different areas in the country will have different priorities. As police leaders, we continuously set priorities with public safety in mind. This will not change with the legalization of cannabis, and there are other public safety issues more pressing than this.

Although, as I have outlined, it may take time to work out certain issues related to the new legislation and regulations, I can tell you that police are ready to target drug-impaired drivers.

New impaired driving offences have been identified in the new legislation. While Bill C-45, which legalizes cannabis, comes into effect on October 17th, only parts of Bill C-46, which deals with impaired driving, will come into force. Some of the new offences that have been introduced are in Part 2 of the law and will come into effect on December 18th.

Police may see an increase in the number of drug-impaired drivers on our roads once cannabis is legalized. We have well established techniques to detect impairment that have successfully passed the test of the courts for many years now. We will continue to rely on Standard Field Sobriety Testing and Drug Recognition Experts to detect and deal with drug-impaired drivers. We're very confident in our present processes which will continue to improve with time, as we build more capacity.

At present, there are more than 13,000 police officers trained in standard field sobriety testing across Canada and we are expecting this number to rise to 20,000 in the next three years. In addition, there are approximately 833 drug recognition experts throughout the country. The RCMP, provincial partners and local police have a goal of training a minimum of 500 more certified drug recognition experts over the next five years. The numbers are increasing and will continue to grow as time goes on.

As for roadside drug screening devices, the CACP has continuously stated that such testers remain an additional tool for police officers and are only one piece of the overall solution. To date, only one model has been approved for use by the federal government. This represents the first of what we anticipate will be additional options to come.

The CACP encourages further research and the development of screening devices capable of quantifying THC levels.

However, each individual police service in Canada will evaluate and determine the potential use of drug screening devices to meet the needs of their police agency and the communities they serve.

The same applies to workplace policies regarding cannabis consumption by off-duty police officers. A one-size-fits-all approach will not meet the needs of all police services in Canada. Like other workplace policies, decisions need to be made by individual police services.

The evidence is simply not there to endorse one specific approach over another. As a result, some police services are taking a zero-tolerance approach. Others are opting for established timeframes between consumption and active duty. And finally, others are using "fit for duty" policies that state that employees shall not be under the influence while on shift and must remain fit-for-duty during the course of their duties.

Police leaders are making decisions with a goal to ensure health and safety in their workplace as well as in their community. Keep in mind that the workplace policies adopted today are not cast in stone – they may change in time as our experience evolves.

Moving forward, there are two areas where we will continue to encourage the government to build on the work that has already been done: the first relates to organized crime and the second to consumption by youth.

We know organized crime will attempt to capitalize on the legalization of cannabis. On this front, the CACP supports any initiative that dissuades Canadians from turning to the black market to obtain cannabis.

We're doing everything we can to stop organized crime from becoming involved in both the medical and recreational marijuana industries.

We're also counting on clear packaging and labeling that details the penalties for the illegal production and trafficking of cannabis.

The CACP supports all efforts to deter and reduce criminal activity by imposing appropriate penalties for those breaking the law, especially those who import or export cannabis, or provide cannabis to our youth.

The CACP believes that strong and sustained messaging and education campaigns for youth are essential to raise awareness of the dangers of youth consumption and distribution.

There is no doubt that Canadians are headed into uncharted waters with the legalization of cannabis. There is no exception for those responsible for public safety. However, we have, and will continue, to enhance the preparedness of Canada's police officers.

Thank you.