

# Presidential Commission Shocks White House: Recommends Marijuana Should Be 'Decriminalized'\*

Washington, DC - A Presidential commission's report recommends that marijuana be legalized.

The Commission concluded that marijuana users "are essentially indistinguishable from their non-marijuana using peers by any fundamental criterion other than their marijuana use."

They found that, "Neither the marijuana user nor the drug itself can be said to constitute a danger to public safety."

The Commission recommended "Decriminalization of possession of marijuana for personal use on both the state and federal levels."

The Commission's findings caught many by surprise since both the President and the former Republican governor of Pennsylvania who chaired the Commission have reputations for tough 'law and order' approaches to drug law enforcement.

The President refused to read the report. He said in a news conference, "I am against legalizing marijuana. Even if the Commission does recommend that it be legalized, I will not follow that recommendation."

**\* The Shafer Commission issued its report on marijuana policy on March 22, 1972-30 years ago. President Nixon ignored the scientific advice he was given. The Netherlands, which had a similar commission, did not. Today, marijuana use in Holland is half that of the U.S.<sup>1</sup>**

***Over 100,000 Americans die annually from consumption of alcohol.<sup>2</sup>***

***None (0) die from consumption of marijuana.<sup>3</sup>***

***734,497 arrests were made for marijuana in 2000.<sup>4</sup> Countless families are destroyed.***

## Is criminalizing marijuana use sensible public policy? Is it time for marijuana to be treated like alcohol?

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<sup>1</sup> Netherlands: Lifetime prevalence of marijuana use ages 12-up, 15.6%; past month, 2.5% (source: Abraham, Manja D., et al., "Licit and Illicit Drug Use in the Netherlands, 1997" (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Center for Drug Research, Sept. 1999); US: lifetime prevalence of marijuana use ages 12-up, 34.2%; past month, 4.8% (source: SAMHSA, US Dept. of Health and Human Services, "Summary of Findings from the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (Rockville, MD: SAMHSA, Sept. 2001), p. 132, Table F2, from the web at <http://www.samhsa.gov/oas/NHSDA/2kNHSDA/2kNHSDA.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> "Number of deaths and age-adjusted death rates per 100,000 population for categories of alcohol-related mortality, United States and States, 1979-96," National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, from the web at <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/databases/armort01.txt>.

<sup>3</sup> Reports of the Drug Abuse Warning Network show no deaths attributed to marijuana; see also Joy, Janet E., et al., "Marijuana and Medicine: Assessing the Science Base," Institute of Medicine, (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999); and US Dept. of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, "In the Matter of Marijuana Rescheduling Petition," Docket #86-22, Sept. 6, 1988, p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Report, "Crime in America 2000" (Washington, DC: US Dept. of Justice, Oct. 2001).