

Butane hash oil: Public safety is focus of states' marijuana regulations

By Noelle Crombie

oregonlive.com – The Oregonian | May 12, 2014 at 9:01 AM, updated May 12, 2014 at 11:50 AM

Colorado and Washington, where voters have also approved recreational marijuana, have begun to grapple with the booming market for marijuana oils, concentrates and extracts -- all potent derivatives of the marijuana plant.

In Colorado, for instance, butane hash oil sold by state-licensed retailers must be produced in a commercial-grade “closed-loop system,” which keeps flammable solvents from escaping into the room. The systems, in use by a few commercial BHO producers in Oregon, are considered safer because they prevent the solvent from filling an enclosed space, where it can more easily ignite.

Colorado requires a certified industrial hygienist or engineer inspect the system, which must operate in a commercial setting. People making BHO must undergo criminal background checks and safety training.

Washington also will require commercial closed-loop systems for making BHO when its recreational market launches this year. Like Oregon, however, Washington’s medical marijuana program doesn’t regulate BHO production.

Both states require BHO be tested for residual butane before landing on dispensary shelves, though Colorado’s testing requirements are more stringent than those in Washington.

California allows medical marijuana patients to possess but not produce BHO.

In Colorado, state regulation of hash oil has done little to dent the steady rise of BHO-related explosions.

Kevin Wong, a Rocky Mountain High Intensity Trafficking Area analyst in Colorado, said people continue to make the product at home because it’s cheaper than buying it.

Said Wong: “That is part of the mindset: ‘If I can do it at home, why spend money on this?’”

Rob Bovett, former district attorney for Lincoln County and the legal counsel for the Association of Oregon Counties, said a legislative task force is expected to convene this fall to tackle marijuana-related policy issues.

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