

Lives Put At Risk As Hash Explosions Are On The Rise

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DENVER (CBS4) – The number of hash explosions in Colorado have skyrocketed in Colorado since the sale of recreational marijuana was legalized on Jan. 1, according to a CBS4 investigation.

A joint task force on drug trafficking says in the first four months of 2014 there have already been 31 explosions, compared to 11 hash explosions the previous year.

There have been four hash explosions in Colorado over the past eight days.

On Monday a hash explosion rocked Clarkson Street near Speer Boulevard in Denver. Fire investigators say people were cooking hash in a basement apartment, sparking the explosion.

The same day the windows were blown out of a home in Leadville in a hash explosion.



Last week three people were injured in a hash explosion in the 1200 block of South Lipan Street in Denver.



On Saturday a Jefferson County man was burned while allegedly cooking hash in his townhouse. Authorities have charged Corbin Brathwaite, 34, with arson and child abuse for an explosion on South Independence Street. Two young children were home at the time.



Mark Techmeyer from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office says the "legalization of marijuana changed everything."

"You never know what your neighbors are doing", he said. "When you are playing chemist with some volatile fuels that can explode you are taking some great risks with others' safety."

In each case people were trying to make hash by extracting THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, from the rest of the plant. Typically unlicensed hash makers douse marijuana with flammable butane gas, and then syphon the gas off, leaving a concentrated hash product.

Marijuana concentrates are often referred to by their consistency. Wax, Budder, Shatter, Honey and BHO are all terms for marijuana concentrates that can range in potency from 60 percent to 90 percent THC. Concentrates are much stronger than marijuana flowers sold in Colorado, which typically range from 15 percent to 25 percent THC.

Concentrates are sold legally in Colorado dispensaries. The state also licenses marijuana extractors who make concentrates for the marijuana industry.

The high potency of concentrates have addiction experts like Dr. Christian Thurstone at Denver Health concerned.

“My young patients tell me that it hits them like heroin, like I.V. heroin,” he said.

Thurstone says he is also concerned with a way of ingesting marijuana that is growing in popularity in Colorado, called “dabbing.” He compares dabbing to freebasing marijuana.

“What my patients have told me is that dabbing is similar to using crack cocaine,” he said.

Dabbers often use a blowtorch to heat up a surface called a “nail.” They then add a small dab of concentrate to the heat and ingest the smoke. Dabbing has become so popular there was a three-day festival dedicated to it during the 4/20 weekend called “Dabroots.” At the event users said dabbing was “absolutely stronger” than any other ingestion method.

Drug experts say the price of concentrates is driving the illegal manufacturing market. It sells retail for \$65 to \$75 a gram. Tom Gorman with the Joint Drug Task Force says some illegal hash makers are making the product for personal use or to share with friends. Other hash makers are selling the finished product on the black market in Colorado and across the country, specifically the Midwest.