

Editorial: Legal weed may affect decisions

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Some folks don't know how to quit when they're - pardon the pun - ahead.

The Associated Press is reporting that, since Colorado legalized recreational marijuana use on Jan. 1, firefighters have responded to 31 butane hash oil explosions. That's compared to 11 in all of 2013.

Hash oil is essentially cooked, concentrated marijuana, created when an intrepid home scientist pours butane over pot leaves and stems and then heats that mixture, producing a sticky oil that can be up to 80 percent THC, the active ingredient in marijuana. The problems occur because many of these kitchen chefs are making the concentrate in rooms without adequate ventilation, allowing butane fumes to linger, needing just the slightest spark to ignite.

Unlike the state of Washington, which likewise allows recreational marijuana use but bans home-growing of the weed, Colorado residents, according to Brian Vicente, who helped write the legalization law, are allowed to process the plants into hash oil, edibles, etcetera. Washington requires producers to be licensed and to install sophisticated ventilation systems.

So, with no law to clearly prohibit this unsafe home practice, law enforcement has been able to charge and prosecute only those careless enough to cause an explosion and fire. The most common charges are arson, endangerment and, if kids are present, child abuse.

It's true, the people have spoken in Colorado, in Washington and even here in Arizona and several other states that now allow medical marijuana use. But, as we have seen on countless other occasions, unintended consequences arise.

According to the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office, if someone around here had a mind to cook up some hash oil, and if that operation got out of hand, the following charges would likely apply: possession of concentrated cannabis/marijuana/narcotic drug, possession of drug paraphernalia, child abuse if children present or known to reside in such location, zoning and/or building code violations and illegal fire/conditions creating a hazard.

That's a lot of risk for someone who just wants to get a little higher.

It's kind of funny, in a way, that when marijuana was completely illegal, its hazards were largely limited to the potential over-consumption of chips and other snacks. Now, with marijuana more out in the open, it appears that folks are making many more questionable choices.

Vicente, according to The Associated Press, believes that once people realize the danger,

they'll stop experimenting and head for the pot shops instead.

We're not sure if we would trust folks to accurately make that risk-reward assessment.