

Metro: Marijuana impairment rising among drivers

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By Joe Bartels, Reporter

LAS VEGAS -- Metro Police said they have a huge problem on their hands when it comes to people using marijuana and driving. During the last three years, Metro's forensics lab screened 4,500 blood samples for marijuana with the bulk of those being impaired drivers.

In Crystal Hill's home, there are memories and pictures of her 18-year-old son Jesse. Jesse died January 1 while walking with his girlfriend. The two were near the family's home when a car slammed into them. Court records show the driver, Christian Diaz, had seven times the legal amount of marijuana in his blood.

"I had to file his first and last tax return yesterday. His brother doesn't talk about him," Crystal Hill said. "They're twenty months apart in age. They were book ends. That was his hero."

Metro Police said marijuana impairment is a problem, and it's getting worse. Metro said drug impairment, unlike alcohol impairment, isn't easy to detect. Department statistics show if police tested each impaired driver involved in a fatal crash today, one in ten would likely test positive for marijuana.

"If it continues on this path, in the next five or six years, we could see marijuana and other non-alcoholic drugs overtake our DUI problem with alcohol," Sgt. Todd Raybuck of Metro's Traffic Bureau said. "We have a short memory when it comes to these accidents, and, unfortunately, that short memory lasts a lifetime for the victims."

Metro said marijuana is dangerous because it slows down mental reactions and a driver's judgment of time and distance. Statewide records from 2002 to 2012 show 45 percent of drivers who were impaired by drugs had marijuana in their system.

Meanwhile, the remains of Jesse Hill now sit in an urn at his mother's house. Crystal said time won't heal her wounds. She says she hopes another family won't have to go through the pain.

"Prior to this, I was for legalizing it for recreational use. Tax it, we'll have more jobs. Maybe we won't have to get bonds for schools, things like that. Now that my son has been killed, I see the other side," Hill said.