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Agency Information Collection Activities; Proposals, Submissions, and Approvals: Strategies to Improve Drug Recognition Experts Officers' Performance and Law Enforcement Agencies' Drug Recognition Experts Programs

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The National Highway Traffic Administration is proposing to implement a study that will collect information on “ways to help improve officers’ performance and law enforcement programs for drug recognition experts.” This additional training will assist officers in recognizing impaired drivers who are under the influence of different types of drugs. For a number of varied reasons, including being a women of color and mother of a male child, I am in full support of any opportunities for our law enforcement to receive additional training outside of firearm skill training.

After reading this notice, I was curious about the correlation between the legalization of marijuana in several states and the fatality car crash rate in those states compared to states where recreational marijuana use is illegal. I focused on Colorado and Wisconsin, mainly because the states are close in population. Colorado made recreational use of marijuana legal in November of 2012. In Wisconsin marijuana use is not permitted. I found that over a five year span (2016-2020) there wasn’t a significant difference in the amount of fatalities in those states. Colorado averaged about 48 more fatal car crashes per year during this period.

Fatal Crashes	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Wisconsin	524	539	517	511	540
Colorado	558	600	588	545	574

There are a number of articles that seem to directly correlate the legalization of marijuana to the increase of fatal car accidents. Regardless of the accuracy of those articles any uptick in accidents or fatalities should be carefully reviewed because this requires law enforcement to come into contact with an increased number of citizens. If this additional training proposed by the NHTSA will assist officers in detecting impaired drivers and interacting with them, it will be a lifesaving investment.