

Growing number of teens view marijuana as a harmless drug

WASHINGTON (AP) — Marijuana use among teen-agers has nearly doubled since 1992, even as their use of all illegal drugs leveled off, the government announced Tuesday.

Some 12.2 million people used illegal drugs last year, up from 11.7 million in 1993 and 11.4 million in 1992, said the 1994 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse. Increases were not considered statistically significant.

At the same time, 1.8 million teen-agers used illegal drugs last year — the vast majority marijuana — the government survey said. The government survey is on the rise among young people after 13 years of decline.

About 7.3 percent of teens — 1.3 million ages 12 to 17 — smoked marijuana last year. That's up from 4.5 percent two years earlier, the survey found. Until 1992, youth marijuana use had declined every year since 1979.

"Anyone who thinks we've licked the drug problem in this country is living in a fantasy land," said Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, whose department conducted the survey.

Shalala used the data to attack House-passed budget cuts that would take \$700 million away from federal drug-abuse programs. The Senate is considering this week whether to let those cuts stand.

"We hope they remember that drug prevention is a national priority of the very same order as cleaning water, good roads and safe streets," Shalala said.

Marijuana accounts for 81 percent of the nation's drug use, and its rise among teens reflects a growing sense that marijuana is benign, said Lee Brown, President Clinton's drug policy coordinator. Only 42 percent of teen-agers considered marijuana a

dangerous drug, down from 50 percent in 1992, the survey found.

"Marijuana is not cool," Shalala told students at a Washington high school Tuesday. "Marijuana use is illegal, it's dangerous, it's unhealthy and it's wrong."

To estimate the prevalence of the use of illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco, HHS surveyed a nationally representative sample of 22,181 people last year. Drug use was defined as taking a drug sometime in the month before the survey. Among other findings:

"Marijuana is not cool. Marijuana use is illegal, it's dangerous, it's unhealthy and it's wrong."

—Donna Shalala
Human Services Secretary

—The proportion of teens who report being approached by someone selling drugs in the month before the survey increased to 18.9 percent last year, up from 14.4 percent in 1993.

—Four million teen-agers smoked cigarettes, steady since 1992.

—Some 1.4 million people of all ages used cocaine and 500,000 used crack. Rates were highest among young adults, 1.2 percent, but just 0.3 percent of teens used cocaine.

To back up the anti-marijuana message to young people, HHS and The Weekly Reader will distribute anti-marijuana educational materials to 5 million students next month.

Also, the government is sending to 16,000 school districts videos that can help parents discuss marijuana with their teens.

Situation NORML

Grass-roots organization aims to educate

By Amy Protas
THE BATTALION

Marijuana, weed, Mary Jane — George Washington and Thomas Jefferson both grew it — the plant otherwise known as cannabis.

Members of the Texas A&M chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws say they hope to help students realize that hemp was once a legal and integral part of society.

The main goal of NORML is to educate students and the community about the positive aspects of hemp.

Sarah Fuentes, a junior English major and NORML president, said people do not realize the uses of hemp.

"We want to distribute as much information to the campus as we can," Fuentes said. "There are so many responsible uses — personal, religious, medicinal and agricultural, to name a few."

The organization's members said the most beneficial uses of hemp are medicinal.

Don Arnold, class of '84 and NORML member, said he joined after his mother died from cancer.

"My interest was sparked after I watched my mom waste away," Arnold said. "I knew marijuana would increase her appetite, but there was no legal way to obtain it."

Being associated with an organization supporting the legalization of marijuana can bring problems to members of NORML.

Tim Colwill, a sophomore general studies major and NORML member, said students have preconceived notions of the organization.

"There is a big misconception about NORML," Colwill said. "People think we just sit around all the time and get high. They're wrong."

Arnold said students gain little from their membership — after all, putting NORML down on a job application wouldn't be the fastest way to get hired. He said people join the organization for personal satisfaction and to educate others about the uses of hemp.



Renee Metoyer, a sophomore psychology major and NORML member, said the organization gets contributions from outside groups and businesses. A lot of times, however, this is done anonymously to avoid ties to the group.

Last year, the organization hosted Hemp Fest, a festival where hemp products were sold and bands played in celebration of the plant. Fuentes said the money raised went to printing fliers to educate the campus.

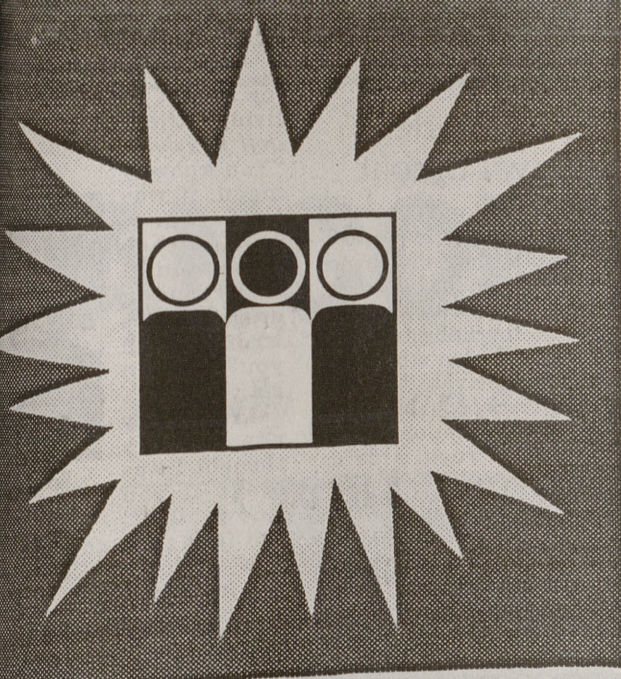
In addition to Hemp Fest, the organization is planning to participate in Big

Event and Earth Day this year. But Fuentes said the group remains focused on educating students about hemp.

She joined NORML for education and said she wants to give that back to the school. "I joined to become informed," Fuentes said. "I learned so much that now I'm angry. Our society is being put under so much oppression. I want to get everyone informed so we can change things."





"We are like the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s," Arnold said.

"There is no personal benefit except trying to change our whole culture for the better."



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CHEM 101 7-9 PM	CH 1,2	CH 3,4	CH 4	PRAC TEST Dr. Conway Dr. Brown Dr. Wolf
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ACCT 328 11 PM - 1 AM	CH 14	CH 17	CH 18	PRAC TEST

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ACCT 229 5-7 PM	CH 4	CH 5	CH 6	PRAC TEST
FINC 341	7-10 PM CH 1,2,3	7-9 PM CH 3,4	7-9 PM PRAC TEST	