

Unveiling the Dirty Secret of California's Legal Weed Industry

Poisons Show Up in California's 'Safe' Weed Products

Aging yuppies in neon beachwear stand before a green wall with the catchphrase, "You have changed ... so has cannabis." This social media post is part of "[Real CA Cannabis](#)," a \$5-million taxpayer-funded campaign to promote California cannabis as safe, tested, and regulated to protect consumers. In reality, that safety is far from certain.

Investigation Findings

An investigation by The Times, in conjunction with WeedWeek, found alarming levels of pesticides in cannabis products on dispensary shelves across the state, including popular brands of vapes and pre-rolled weed. Twenty-five of 42 legal cannabis products tested showed concentrations of pesticides above state-allowed levels or exceeding federal standards for tobacco. Contaminants included chemicals linked to cancer, liver failure, thyroid disease, and genetic and neurologic harm.

Health Risks

Most pesticides found were in low concentrations, risking long-term harm by repeated use. Vapes from five well-known brands had pesticide loads exceeding federal EPA risk thresholds for harm from a single exposure, causing potential irritation to lungs, eyes, and throat. Some products contained up to two dozen pesticides.

Complaints and Contamination

These findings align with complaints from private cannabis testing labs about products certified as safe. Evidence suggests contamination in over 250,000 vapes and pre-rolled joints on store shelves, about the number sold legally in California in a two-day period. Strong profit incentives drive contamination, as expanding markets encourage intensive growing practices using pesticides to protect high-value crops. The popularity of vapes has created demand for bulk oils from lower-quality cannabis, often grown illegally.

Regulatory Failures

California regulators have largely failed to address evidence of widespread contamination, and the state's weed testing requirements have not been updated to include dangerous chemicals currently used in cultivation.