

# The Cost of High Ambitions: Dispensaries Fined for Marketing

## Ohio Fines Dispensaries Over Advertising Violations Amid Recreational Cannabis Rollout

As Ohio launched its recreational marijuana market, the state's Division of Cannabis Control (DCC) levied substantial fines against at least six dispensaries for violating advertising regulations. The violations stemmed from how the businesses marketed their services before and after August 6, 2023, the day the state's recreational cannabis sales officially began. The fines, which totaled over \$200,000, illustrate the state's firm approach to enforcing advertising rules in the early days of recreational sales.

### Advertising Rules and Violations

Ohio's recreational marijuana rollout was met with strict oversight from the DCC, which required dispensaries to adhere to regulations established for medical marijuana operators. According to Tom Brockman, Deputy Chief Communications Officer for the Ohio Department of Commerce and the DCC, dispensaries were required to seek pre-approval for any advertising material. Additionally, using the term "recreational marijuana" in marketing—rather than the state-preferred "adult-use" or "nonmedical"—was considered a violation.

"All operators are currently operating via medical rules," Brockman explained. "As such, they need to seek pre-approval on any advertising, including the use of the term 'recreational marijuana.' Those particular entities that agreed to civil penalties did not seek pre-approval, and that was the basis of their violation."

Below are the fines imposed on the dispensaries, alongside the specific advertising issues that led to their penalties.

### The Source Dispensary: South Euclid

The Source, located in South Euclid, was hit with a significant \$225,000 fine on September 5 for multiple advertising infractions. The DCC flagged the dispensary for allowing marijuana paraphernalia, such as grinders and rolling trays, to be displayed outside the shop, which violated the state's rules. Additionally, the agency took issue with an unauthorized ribbon-cutting ceremony held on August 23 outside the dispensary.

As part of the penalty agreement, The Source was given a payment plan to pay off the fine in monthly installments of \$18,750. The company waived its right to appeal the decision and is expected to pay off the fine within a year.

### The Botanist: Multiple Locations

The Botanist, a chain operated by Greenleaf Apothecaries with locations in Akron, Canton, Cleveland, Columbus, and Wickliffe, was fined \$162,500 for several advertising violations. Initially, the DCC fined the dispensary \$12,500 on August 1 for using a Creed lyric, “Can you take me higher?” on its website, without obtaining pre-approval. Following the start of recreational sales on August 6, the DCC discovered additional infractions, including the use of unapproved food and beverages from an ice cream truck and promoting free ice cream on social media.

These violations led to a further \$150,000 fine, highlighting the DCC’s stringent enforcement of advertising rules.

### **RISE Dispensary: Multiple Locations**

RISE, a dispensary chain owned by GTI Ohio with locations in Cleveland, Lakewood East, Lakewood West, Lorain, and Toledo, faced a \$5,000 fine for prematurely advertising recreational marijuana sales. On June 6, the dispensary mistakenly sent an email to patients stating that RISE locations would be open to both recreational and medical guests starting June 10. Although a correction was sent three hours later, the DCC still took issue with the error and the use of the term “recreational marijuana.”

The DCC reached a settlement with GTI Ohio on June 20, under which the company did not admit fault but agreed to pay the fine and cover \$12,500 in investigative costs.

### **Guaranteed Dispensary: Montgomery**

Guaranteed Dispensary, located in Montgomery, an eastern suburb of Cincinnati, was fined \$12,500 on July 23 for advertising itself as a “recreational and medical dispensary” before receiving approval to market its services this way. The DCC found that the dispensary’s website included this unapproved language as early as June, which led to the fine.

### **Standard Farms: Garfield Heights**

Standard Farms, a medical marijuana processor in Garfield Heights, was fined \$12,500 for similar advertising violations. The company, which received its dual-use certificate before storefronts on August 6, sent emails in July promoting its approval for recreational sales. The DCC took issue with the email language, which included phrases like “dual-use license approval for adult use/recreational sales,” and noted that the company had not submitted the content for approval before sending it out.

### **Bloom Dispensary: Seven Mile**

Bloom, a dispensary in Seven Mile, faced a \$12,500 fine for an unauthorized billboard advertisement. The billboard featured the text “Bloom Medical Marijuana,” which the DCC said had not been pre-approved by the agency. The fine was handed down on July 23, and Bloom was given 14 days to pay.

### **Impact on Ohio’s Cannabis Industry**

The DCC’s enforcement actions against these dispensaries demonstrate Ohio’s commitment to maintaining control over its burgeoning recreational marijuana industry. The rules governing advertising are particularly stringent, and businesses are expected to comply with the same regulations as medical marijuana operators until further guidelines are established. The large fines imposed on the dispensaries show that the state is serious about holding operators accountable for violations, especially in the early stages of the recreational rollout.

As Ohio continues to transition into a dual-use market, businesses will need to carefully navigate the regulatory landscape to avoid further penalties. Dispensaries and other operators must ensure that their marketing materials are pre-approved by the DCC and that they use state-approved language, such as “adult-use” instead of “recreational,” to describe their products.

While the fines represent a costly lesson for the dispensaries involved, they also serve as a warning to other operators in the state. As Ohio’s recreational market expands, the DCC’s strict enforcement policies will likely remain in place to ensure compliance and protect public health and safety.

Email: [info@cannabisriskmanager.com](mailto:info@cannabisriskmanager.com) | Phone: +415-226-4060

© Copyright 2025 Cannabis Risk Manager. All Rights Reserved