

Missouri Governor, AG Announce Task Force for Hemp Regulation

Missouri Governor Mike Parson Announces New Efforts to Regulate Hemp Industry After Emergency Rule Rejection

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson has doubled down on efforts to tighten regulations on the state's hemp industry following the rejection of his emergency rule by the Missouri Secretary of State. On Tuesday, Parson, alongside Attorney General Andrew Bailey, announced the formation of a task force and the launch of a new reporting platform aimed at increasing oversight of hemp products. These steps come as concerns about the safety of hemp-derived products, especially among children, continue to rise.

New Task Force and Reporting Platform Introduced

Starting this month, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services began enforcing Gov. Parson's new hemp regulations. However, with the legislative session still months away, Parson and AG Bailey introduced additional initiatives to bolster control over hemp production and sales. The newly created task force will work to address regulatory gaps, and the reporting platform will allow consumers and authorities to report concerns about mislabeled or dangerous hemp products.

Parson has called for the Missouri Legislature to tackle comprehensive hemp regulations when it reconvenes in January 2025, stating that the interim measures are essential until formal laws can be enacted.

Rising Concerns Over Hemp Exposure in Children

One of the key drivers behind Parson's push for tighter regulation is the alarming increase in accidental cannabis exposure among children. According to the Missouri Poison Center, there were 168 cases of children aged five and under exposed to cannabis products in 2023, compared to only five cases in 2018. This dramatic rise has been linked to misleading packaging, particularly of edibles like gummies and brownies, which children can easily mistake for regular food.

"Most children eat the gummies and brownies, thinking it's something OK to eat," said Julie Weber, Director of the Missouri Poison Center. Weber has been a vocal advocate for clearer packaging and more stringent oversight to prevent further incidents.

Industry Concerns and Pushback

While Gov. Parson's efforts aim to protect Missouri residents, members of the state's hemp industry argue that the governor's approach casts a negative light on their business as a whole. John Grady, co-owner of the Slap Happy Hemp Company in Central Missouri, expressed frustration over the lack of communication between the governor's office and industry stakeholders.

“[I hope] that the legislator will actually work forward and put together comprehensive regulations for the hemp industry to protect Missouri citizens, Missouri children, and the farmers of the hemp industry, the producers of the hemp industry, so we do not kill that industry,” Grady said.

Grady and others in the industry agree that some regulation is necessary, especially to target bad actors, but they believe that a collaborative approach involving producers and retailers would yield better outcomes.

Industry Leaders Demand a Seat at the Table

Brooklyn Hill, president of the Missouri Hemp Trade, echoed the industry’s concerns about being excluded from discussions surrounding the new regulations. She criticized Tuesday’s announcement as unproductive and suggested that Gov. Parson and AG Bailey engage more directly with hemp producers and retailers to craft solutions that address safety concerns without stifling the industry.

“The governor is still not inviting any hemp producers or retailers to the table,” Hill said. “We need to be part of the conversation if we want to create meaningful regulations.”

Commitment to Legislative Action in 2025

During Tuesday’s press conference, Lee’s Summit Republican Rep. Jon Patterson, who is expected to take on the role of Speaker of the House next year, expressed his commitment to working on hemp regulations in the upcoming legislative session. Patterson’s presence at the event signals that the Missouri Legislature is likely to address the issue head-on when it reconvenes in January.

As the debate over hemp regulation intensifies, Missouri’s hemp industry is hopeful that future discussions will include their input, allowing for regulations that protect both consumers and businesses alike.

Striking a Balance in Hemp Regulation

Gov. Parson’s actions reflect growing concern over the need for stricter oversight of hemp products, particularly those that may pose risks to children. However, balancing consumer safety with the needs of the hemp industry remains a delicate task. Industry leaders are advocating for comprehensive regulations that differentiate between responsible producers and those violating standards, while the state aims to protect public health.

With legislative action expected in 2025, Missouri’s hemp industry will be watching closely, hoping for a regulatory framework that promotes safety without crippling the emerging market.

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