

Major Cannabis Markets Lack Oversight on Suspicious Lab Results

California Shuts Down Cannabis Testing Lab for Pesticide Contamination

The **California Department of Cannabis Control** (DCC) revoked a commercial testing laboratory's permit after a state-run lab uncovered a harmful pesticide in marijuana products that the private lab had cleared for sale. This enforcement action, which took place a month ago, highlights the importance of reliable product testing in the cannabis industry and underscores concerns about the effectiveness of private lab oversight in regulated marijuana markets.

The Role of Reference Labs in Ensuring Cannabis Safety

The revocation of the lab's license has sparked broader discussions about the need for **reference laboratories** in cannabis regulation. Industry leaders and the **Cannabis Regulators Association (CANNRA)** have consistently advocated for the use of reference labs to verify the accuracy of private cannabis labs' results. Reference labs are government-run or independent labs that act as a check on private labs, ensuring compliance with safety standards and verifying the potency of cannabis products.

Without reference labs, many states rely on private, third-party labs to test cannabis products for harmful contaminants like pesticides and mold. However, critics argue that this system can fail if the labs are not properly regulated or if they prioritize profit over safety.

A National Problem: Inadequate Oversight in Major Markets

According to an analysis by **MJBizDaily**, more than half of the largest marijuana markets in the U.S. do not have a reference lab in place. This lack of oversight raises concerns about the safety and accuracy of cannabis products being sold to consumers. **Lab shopping**, where retailers seek out labs that provide more favorable results, is a long-standing issue in the industry and has eroded consumer confidence in legal cannabis products.

In California, the absence of proper oversight has led to serious consequences. Since **December 2023**, the DCC has revoked the licenses of four commercial marijuana labs after finding serious issues, such as inflated **THC potency** results and the failure to detect banned pesticides. These problems only came to light after the state's reference labs—operated by the **California Department of Toxic Substances Control** and the **Department of Food and Agriculture**—tested the products.

States With and Without Reference Labs

Some states have established reference laboratories to address these issues. According to CANNRA, the following states currently have reference labs in place for their regulated marijuana markets:

California

Colorado

Florida

Iowa

Maryland

Montana

New Mexico

New York

Oregon

Utah

Washington

West Virginia

These labs provide an additional layer of verification, ensuring that cannabis products meet safety standards before they are sold to consumers.

Several states, including **Delaware, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Mississippi**, are in the process of establishing reference labs. These states aim to improve their regulatory frameworks and strengthen consumer protections by implementing independent testing systems.

States Lagging Behind on Cannabis Testing Oversight

Despite the benefits of reference labs, some large cannabis markets still lack this critical oversight. States like **Arizona, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Ohio** have yet to implement reference lab systems. This gap leaves these markets vulnerable to inconsistencies in testing and potential health risks for consumers.

In **Massachusetts**, for example, the state's **Cannabis Control Commission (CCC)** has faced criticism for failing to adequately test products for safety. The state contracted a private lab to run a "secret shopper" program, where products are randomly purchased from store shelves for testing. However, according to a report by **The Boston Globe**, the state has yet to submit any products for testing, raising questions about the effectiveness of this oversight strategy.

Impact of Lab Failures on Consumer Confidence

The failure of cannabis testing labs to uphold safety standards has led to product recalls and legal action in multiple states. In California, the discovery of pesticide contamination and inflated THC levels has shaken consumer trust in the legal cannabis market. As states continue to legalize cannabis, regulators must ensure that the products being sold are not only safe but also accurately labeled to protect consumers.

Critics argue that without independent reference labs, the potency and safety profiles on cannabis products cannot be trusted. Instances of **lab shopping** and faulty testing practices underscore the need for a reliable, unbiased system of oversight.

High Costs of Implementing Reference Labs

One challenge to implementing reference labs is the cost. In **New Jersey**, medical marijuana products were once tested by the state's **Public Health and Environmental Laboratory (PHEL)**, but the state stopped this practice when it began licensing private labs. Some lab operators have called for the state to reinstate PHEL as a reference lab, arguing that it would strengthen oversight and ensure the accuracy of cannabis testing. However, the financial burden of running a state-operated lab has led to delays in setting up these systems in many states.

The Future of Cannabis Testing in the U.S.

As more states legalize cannabis, the role of reference labs will likely become increasingly important in maintaining the integrity of the legal market. By providing independent oversight and verifying the results of private labs, reference labs help ensure that cannabis products are safe for consumption and accurately labeled.

While some states have taken proactive steps to implement these labs, others continue to face challenges related to cost and regulatory structure. As the cannabis industry grows, the need for robust testing and oversight will remain a critical issue for regulators, industry operators, and consumers alike.

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