

Beer Industry Pushes for Stricter Cannabis Rules, Higher Taxes

Beer Industry Trade Group Calls for Stricter Regulations on Cannabis and Hemp Products

A prominent trade organization representing the U.S. beer industry has issued a set of guiding principles addressing the burgeoning market of intoxicating hemp and cannabis products. The Beer Institute, a key voice for American brewers and beer importers, has raised concerns about the risks posed by these products to public safety and consumer health. Their recommendations, released last week, call for tighter regulations, higher taxes, and restrictions on combining cannabis with alcohol.

Concerns Over “Unregulated” Cannabis and Hemp Products

The Beer Institute’s new guidelines aim to tackle what the organization describes as a “proliferation of largely unregulated intoxicating hemp and cannabis products.” The group argues that current laws and regulations governing THC products fail to meet the stringent standards adhered to by the alcohol industry.

“For decades, America’s brewers and beer importers have demonstrated their commitment to fostering a culture of moderation and the responsible consumption of our products, all within a robust regulatory and taxation system,” said Brian Crawford, president and CEO of the Beer Institute.

In their statement, the trade group outlined several concerns, including risks to public safety, the need for consumer protection, and gaps in regulatory oversight.

Key Recommendations in the Beer Institute’s Principles

The document includes several recommendations designed to shape future policymaking around cannabis and hemp products:

Zero Tolerance for THC and Driving: The Beer Institute advocates for a strict “zero tolerance” policy on driving under the influence of THC. This approach could create challenges for casual cannabis users, as THC metabolites can remain in the body for days or even weeks after use, potentially leading to legal consequences long after intoxication has subsided.

Taxation Above Alcohol Levels: The organization recommends implementing a federal excise tax on hemp and cannabis products, with rates set higher than those for any alcoholic beverage. This proposal reflects concerns about the potential for cannabis to compete with alcohol sales while ensuring additional revenue streams for regulatory enforcement.

Prohibition on Mixing Alcohol and THC: The group calls for maintaining the federal ban on combining intoxicating cannabinoids with alcoholic beverages. This prohibition, they argue, is necessary to prevent the

compounded risks associated with consuming both substances simultaneously.

Consumer Protection Through Regulation: The trade group emphasizes the need for robust state and federal regulatory frameworks that prioritize consumer safety, proper marketing practices, and responsible consumption of hemp and cannabis products.

Legalization Left to Lawmakers

While the Beer Institute refrains from taking a stance on cannabis legalization itself, the group stresses that if intoxicating hemp and cannabis products are legalized, appropriate oversight must be established. They urge policymakers to adopt frameworks that ensure the responsible marketing and sale of these products, aligning with standards already in place for the beer industry.

“Legalization of consumable cannabis products is for American voters, state legislatures, and Congress to decide,” the statement reads. However, it notes a “lack of scientific data regarding the consumption of intoxicating hemp and cannabis products,” underscoring the need for caution.

Alcohol vs. Cannabis: A Question of Relative Harm

Notably absent from the Beer Institute’s recommendations is an evaluation of the relative harms of alcohol and cannabis consumption. This omission comes amid growing public and scientific discourse comparing the risks associated with the two substances.

A study conducted earlier this year by the Alcohol Research Group and RTI International found that secondhand harm from alcohol—defined as the negative effects experienced by others due to someone’s drinking—was nearly six times greater than that from cannabis. Additionally, perceived harms from opioids and other illicit drugs outweighed those related to marijuana use.

Despite this, the Beer Institute remains focused on advocating for stringent oversight of cannabis and hemp products rather than drawing comparisons to alcohol.

The Regulatory Patchwork Problem

The Beer Institute’s call for stricter regulation highlights the challenges posed by the current “patchwork” of state and federal cannabis laws. Under the 2018 Farm Bill, hemp-derived products containing less than 0.3% THC are federally legal, but higher-THC products remain illegal at the federal level despite state-level legalization in many areas.

This regulatory inconsistency has created significant gaps in consumer protection, product labeling, and enforcement, leaving both businesses and consumers navigating unclear territory.

The Beer Institute argues that adopting clear, uniform regulations for intoxicating hemp and cannabis products is essential to protect consumers and communities. These regulations, they suggest, should address product safety, marketing practices, and public health risks in a way that mirrors the oversight of alcoholic beverages.

Tensions Between Industries

The Beer Institute’s push for tighter controls on cannabis and hemp products also reflects broader tensions between the alcohol and cannabis industries. As cannabis legalization expands across the United States, the alcohol industry has faced increasing competition from THC-infused products, which appeal to overlapping

consumer demographics.

By advocating for higher taxes and stricter regulations on cannabis, the Beer Institute seeks to maintain a competitive advantage while emphasizing its commitment to responsible business practices.

A Broader Debate on Public Safety

The Beer Institute's zero-tolerance stance on THC and driving has sparked debate over the fairness and practicality of such a policy. Critics argue that current testing methods for THC impairment are insufficient, as they often detect inactive metabolites that do not correlate with intoxication.

Implementing a zero-tolerance policy could disproportionately affect individuals who use cannabis legally and responsibly, potentially barring them from driving for extended periods after consumption.

Proponents, however, contend that strict measures are necessary to prevent impaired driving and protect public safety, drawing parallels to longstanding laws and enforcement strategies for alcohol-related driving offenses.

The Path Forward for Cannabis Regulation

As the cannabis industry continues to grow, the Beer Institute's recommendations add another layer to the ongoing conversation about how to regulate intoxicating hemp and cannabis products. While their proposals prioritize public safety and consumer protection, they also raise questions about equity, fairness, and the potential influence of competing industries on cannabis policy.

Whether policymakers adopt these guiding principles or chart a different course, the Beer Institute's statement underscores the need for comprehensive regulatory frameworks that address the unique challenges posed by the evolving cannabis market.

For now, the debate over cannabis and hemp regulation remains a contentious issue, with stakeholders from multiple industries vying to shape the future of this rapidly expanding market.

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