

Colorado Cannabis Testing Reveals Pesticides, Microbial Issues

Colorado Cannabis Products Face Health and Labeling Law Violations: Study Finds Over 80% of Products Non-Compliant

A new study reveals widespread violations of health and labeling laws in Colorado's adult-use cannabis market, with more than 85% of products potentially breaching state regulations, raising concerns about consumer safety and the effectiveness of regulatory oversight.

Frustration Leads to Self-Funded Study by Ripple CEO to Test Cannabis Products Sold in Colorado

In an attempt to address growing concerns about the reliability of cannabis testing in Colorado, Justin Singer, the CEO of Ripple, a cannabis manufacturing company, launched a study to independently test cannabis products sold in Denver-area retail stores. Frustrated by the apparent reluctance of the Colorado Marijuana Enforcement Division (MED) to rigorously test cannabis products and enforce penalties for violations, Singer directed his team to purchase a variety of cannabis products—flower, shake, and pre-rolls—from local dispensaries on November 12, 2024.

The company then sent these unmarked samples to a state-regulated laboratory for testing, specifically assessing potency, pesticide levels, yeast, mold, and microbial contamination. The results were alarming, with only two of the 15 products purchased meeting state regulations.

Lab Results Reveal Widespread Issues with Potency and Contaminants in Cannabis Products

Out of the 15 products tested, 12 (80%) failed to meet Colorado's legal THC variance of 15%, with many of the products showing dangerous levels of contaminants. In particular, four samples contained coliform bacteria, including one pre-roll that tested 120 times over the legal limit for industrial hemp. Coliform, which can include *E. coli*, is often found in feces, raising serious concerns about consumer health.

In addition to the microbiological contamination, the potency tests revealed significant discrepancies between the labeled THC content and the actual amounts in the products. On average, the THC levels on product labels were 34.2% higher than what was found in the tests. In the case of shake products, the difference was even more dramatic—averaging 59.1% more THC than what was actually present.

The Colorado Marijuana Enforcement Division Responds to Testing Concerns

Elizabeth Kosar, a spokesperson for the MED, responded to the findings by stating that the state's Department of Public Health and Environment's Laboratory Services Division is responsible for auditing cannabis testing facilities. Kosar also highlighted that Colorado's marijuana testing protocols are evolving, particularly in regard to pesticide testing, which has been updated to align with other state programs. However, the results from Ripple's study suggest that these measures are insufficient to ensure product safety

and accuracy in labeling.

Colorado law requires testing for various contaminants, including yeast, mold, residual solvents, heavy metals, and pesticides. However, testing for coliform bacteria is not mandated by state law, even though 17 other states require it. Ripple's study paid for this additional testing and revealed concerning results, further underscoring the potential gaps in Colorado's regulatory system.

Experts Express Alarm Over Health Risks and the Need for Stronger Enforcement

Jill Ellsworth, CEO of Willow Industries, a cannabis decontamination company, reviewed the Ripple study and expressed deep concern about the contamination found in the products. "The coliform and aerobic bacteria are absolutely, definitely, the most concerning," she said, describing coliform as "essentially feces." The study also found that two of the cannabis samples exceeded the allowable limits for aerobic plate count, a measure of microbial activity in cannabis.

Ellsworth and Singer both agree that Colorado's enforcement of testing regulations is inadequate, which is contributing to a dangerous marketplace. The lack of effective inspections and oversight leaves consumers vulnerable to substandard and potentially harmful products.

Calls for a Cannabis-Specific Reference Lab and Better Regulation

One of the key recommendations from the study is the creation of a cannabis-specific reference lab in Colorado. Singer believes that the state should establish a lab to test cannabis products sold in regulated retail stores, similar to those in Michigan and other states with more rigorous testing protocols. Such a lab could help ensure that products meet safety standards before reaching consumers.

The Ripple study also suggested that the MED should standardize testing methods across the state to eliminate discrepancies between laboratories. This would ensure that potency results are consistent and more accurate, preventing misleading THC claims on product labels.

Potency Misinformation Creates Unfair Market for Colorado Cannabis Consumers

The study's findings highlight another critical issue: unreliable potency tests, which are skewing the market and leading consumers to make purchasing decisions based on inaccurate THC claims. Products with misleading potency labels create an unfair playing field, as brands that report higher THC levels are often favored by retailers, pushing more accurately labeled products out of the market.

According to Singer, some producers who adhere to legal standards and strive for realistic THC levels, such as cultivators producing 25% THC flower, find it difficult to compete with brands claiming THC content in the 30% range. This creates an environment where consumers are often misled by false potency claims, resulting in an unfair marketplace and potential consumer dissatisfaction.

Proposal for Improved Oversight and Inspections by the Marijuana Enforcement Division

Both Singer and Ellsworth advocate for increased inspections and regulatory oversight of cannabis manufacturers. Ellsworth, who previously ran a cold-pressed juice company, noted that food producers are subject to regular inspections by the state to ensure compliance with safety standards. She argues that Colorado's cannabis industry should be held to the same level of scrutiny to protect consumers and maintain the integrity of the market.

Kosar of the MED defended the division's enforcement efforts, citing over 2,600 investigations conducted in 2024 alone. However, Singer contends that these investigations have not been effective in addressing the root causes of product quality issues, such as contaminated products and inaccurate labeling.

Ripple's Study Calls for Immediate Action to Protect Colorado Cannabis Consumers

As the study's findings continue to generate concern, Ripple CEO Justin Singer is calling on state regulators to take immediate action to address the issues uncovered in the study. The potential public health risks posed by contaminated cannabis products and the unfair competition created by false THC potency claims cannot be ignored.

For Singer, the issue is clear: "The integrity of Colorado's cannabis market is at risk, and consumers are being defrauded every day." He urges the MED and other state officials to step up enforcement and implement stronger testing procedures to ensure that Colorado's regulated cannabis market remains safe, fair, and transparent for consumers. Until then, the public health and economic repercussions of these violations will continue to plague the state's legal cannabis industry.

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