

Georgia Hemp Industry Reacts to Hurricane Impact, New Regulations

Georgia Hemp Industry Faces Dual Challenges: New Regulations and Hurricane Helene's Aftermath

The Georgia hemp industry is grappling with significant obstacles this week, navigating both new regulations that went into effect on October 1 and the devastating impact of Hurricane Helene. The changes to the regulatory landscape are expected to reshape the industry, with some stakeholders warning that the new rules could drive businesses out of the state for good.

New Regulations Shake Up Georgia Hemp Industry

The new hemp regulations, which took effect this week, stand to alter the fortunes of many Georgia-based hemp operators. Among the most notable changes is a ban on the sale of [hemp flower and hemp pre-rolls](#), products that were top sellers for many companies. **Joe Salome** and **Ryan Dills**, managing partners at **The Georgia Hemp Co.**, noted that their Atlanta-based stores had relied heavily on the sale of THCA flower.

Consumers who didn't stock up on hemp flower before October 1 will likely turn to **e-commerce or the illicit market**, a concern echoed by many industry experts. **Hemp Businesses Facing Possible Shutdowns**

Legal experts predict that many hemp businesses in Georgia will not survive the regulatory overhaul. **Paula Savchenko**, a Florida-based attorney, described Georgia's new rules as some of the most restrictive in the U.S., affecting about 80% of products sold in the state's hemp retail stores.

With a 90-day grace period provided by the **Georgia Department of Agriculture**, hemp businesses are being encouraged to adapt quickly, though **Governor Brian Kemp** has warned that law enforcement will begin enforcing the rules immediately.

Some operators, including The Georgia Hemp Co., are already taking drastic measures to comply. Salome noted that they are retiring many of their infused edibles, including CBD dog biscuits. **Delta-9 THC edibles** will be limited to **10 milligrams per serving** and **150 milligrams per package**, with **gummies** being the only permitted hemp-based edible in stores.

Lab Testing and QR Codes Required

New regulations also require hemp operators to test their products in state-licensed laboratories and provide **Certificates of Authenticity (COAs)** via QR codes to consumers. Dills from The Georgia Hemp Co. believes this change will help eliminate underground operators selling products at gas stations and convenience stores without proper oversight.

“It’s going to make it a lot harder for people to operate undercover that aren’t aboveboard,” Dills said, noting that they have always used third-party testing to ensure their products meet legal standards.

Hurricane Helene’s Devastating Impact

As Georgia hemp operators scrambled to adjust to the new rules, they were simultaneously recovering from **Hurricane Helene**, which struck the state last week. The hurricane’s 100 mph winds hit South Georgia hardest, destroying a significant portion of the outdoor hemp crop.

Hemp farmer **John Downs** reported losing two-thirds of his crop near Thomaston, Georgia. “I have about 10 plants that made it out of about 500 that were still outside,” Downs said, describing efforts to salvage what remained of his harvest by re-caging and re-staking the surviving plants.

A Shrinking Industry

Georgia’s hemp industry is already small, with a focus on retailers rather than cultivators or manufacturers. The new regulations, combined with natural disasters like Hurricane Helene, have exacerbated the challenges for hemp businesses. According to the **U.S. Department of Agriculture**, Georgia farmers planted half as many acres of hemp in 2023 as they did in 2021, with acreage dropping from 130 to 60.

Despite the regulatory hurdles, some industry stakeholders remain hopeful. Dills and Salome credit their business relationships with operators from the western U.S. for helping them navigate the evolving industry. However, the general sentiment within Georgia’s hemp community is one of uncertainty as the new rules are implemented and the industry works to recover from both regulatory and environmental challenges.

Looking Ahead

As the Georgia hemp industry adjusts to the new reality of stricter regulations and ongoing challenges, industry leaders and businesses will be closely monitoring how these changes affect their ability to operate and compete. With many already feeling the pressure, the future of hemp in Georgia remains uncertain.

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