

# NYC's War on Underground Weed: Cracking Down on Illicit Cannabis Sellers

Authorities in New York City have initiated a citywide crackdown on rampant illicit cannabis sales, aiming to curtail unauthorized distribution of marijuana.

## **Enforcement Action**

Sheriff's deputies and police visited at least 20 locations suspected of selling marijuana without a permit, taking measures such as padlocking the doors of a smoke shop in Tribeca near City Hall, as reported by New York TV station WCBS.

## **Response to Illicit Market**

This crackdown follows the granting of new powers to local officials by state lawmakers, empowering them to address the bold and widespread illicit cannabis market that critics argue is undermining New York's fledgling legal marijuana industry.

## **Challenges Post-Legalization**

Despite the legalization of adult-use cannabis in 2021, New York faced challenges including lawsuits and administrative hurdles that complicated the rollout of legal sales, leading Governor Kathy Hochul to describe it as a "disaster."

## **Encouraging Illicit Trade**

The prolonged gap between legalization and the commencement of licensed sales, coupled with lenient enforcement, has facilitated the emergence of what could be the nation's most significant illicit cannabis market.

## **Extent of the Issue**

Estimates of the number of unlicensed sellers in New York vary, with Mayor Eric Adams suggesting it could be as high as 2,800, indicating the scale of the challenge faced by law enforcement.

## **Aggressive Approach**

Mayor Adams asserted the readiness of law enforcement to address these concerns, emphasizing their commitment to target all unlicensed sellers. The mayor's statement underscores the city's determination to tackle the issue head-on.

## **Limited Legal Outlets**

Despite the significant presence of unlicensed sellers, New York has only 119 legal marijuana stores operational, according to data from the Office of Cannabis Management, highlighting the scarcity of legal

outlets.

### **Challenges in Enforcement**

While Mayor Adams had previously pledged to shut down all unlicensed sellers within 30 days of being granted expanded enforcement powers, he tempered expectations during a recent update, refraining from disclosing the number of closures achieved thus far.

### **Impact on Legal Sales**

The prevalence of illicit sellers has adversely affected legal sales, with revenues in 2023 amounting to only \$123 million, significantly lower than initial projections, illustrating the disruptive influence of the illicit market on the regulated cannabis industry in New York.

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