



Research Report

MARIJUANA-ONLY DRUG ABUSE DEATHS – 2002 31 Metropolitan Areas & A Base National Projection

This report shows the numbers of marijuana-only drug abuse deaths reported to the Drug Abuse Warning Network (D.A.W.N.) by voluntary participating coroners and medical examiners in the indicated large metropolitan areas for 2002. This report presents only the numbers of deaths where marijuana was the only drug involved (although alcohol may also have been used).

DAWN has two types of drug abuse deaths reported:

- Drug-induced (the drug or drugs caused the death), and
- Drug-related (the drug played only a contributory role in the death, and was not the direct cause).

D.A.W.N. does not include any deaths in which the decedent had not personally used a drug. Cases reflect only the number of drug abuse deaths reviewed, identified, and reported to D.A.W.N.. Specific methods and procedures used to identify drug abuse deaths and the associated drugs may vary. For example, some jurisdictions may report cases involving circumstantial evidence, while others may report only drug abuse deaths confirmed through toxicological analyses.

Because only selected metro areas participate in the D.A.W.N. collection program, these totals are not nationally representative. A metro area may not be complete in terms of population covered, and it appears some metros may substantially underreport drug abuse deaths in general where drug use is only a contributing factor and not the direct cause of death. Therefore, the figures in the Table may not be totals for an entire particular metro area and may not be comparable from one to another.

D.A.W.N. also cautions that some jurisdictions do not conduct toxicology tests for marijuana and do not report marijuana to D.A.W.N., with the extent of this underreporting unknown.

When reported, marijuana is usually in combination with other drugs. (When any marijuana deaths were reported, 77% involved both marijuana and at least one other drug.) This report shows figures for the deaths in which marijuana was the only drug reported in the death (that is, the other 23% of deaths).

For 2002, there were a total of 157 deaths in the 31 metro areas in which marijuana was the only drug reported. Two of these deaths were reported as being induced, or directly caused, by marijuana (that is, an overdose). These two deaths, and the other deaths shown in this analysis, provide evidence to refute the claims that "no one ever died from marijuana."

There were no marijuana-only drug abuse deaths in 11 of the 31 metro areas. However, Detroit reported 39, Kansas City 32, and Philadelphia reported 16. Six other metro areas had between 7 and 9 marijuana-only deaths each.

Of the 157 total deaths involving only marijuana, 35 were suicides, 53 were accidental/unexpected, and 69 fell into the remaining "all other" category.

Assuming marijuana-only drug abuse deaths occurred at the same rate per capita in the rest of the Nation as they did in these identified large metro areas, a base "national" figure of 581 can be projected.

This estimated figure would still be too low, however. As noted above, the D.A.W.N. drug abuse death figures contain substantial elements of underreporting. It's not possible to account for this underreporting and estimate a more accurate national total. Apparently, though, solely-marijuana-related drug deaths occur many hundreds of times a year. This analysis shows that marijuana is the sole drug in deaths much more commonly than may have been previously recognized. Its prevalence in these deaths provides further documentation of the social harms caused by marijuana and supports continued prohibition and opposition to this drug's proliferation.

**MARIJUANA-ONLY DRUG ABUSE DEATHS
(MARIJUANA ONLY DRUG INVOLVED)**

2002

Drug Abuse Warning Network (D.A.W.N.)

METRO AREA (Non-Zero Metro Areas are Bolded)	“SINGLE- DRUG” MARIJUANA DEATHS	DRUG- INDUCED / DIRECT CAUSE (OVERDOSE)	SUICIDE	ACCIDENTAL/ UNEXPECTED	OTHER
ATLANTA	7	1	1	6	0
BALTIMORE	0	0	0	0	0
BIRMINGHAM	0	0	0	0	0
BOSTON	1	1	1	0	0
BOULDER	0	0	0	0	0
BUFFALO	7	0	1	2	4
CHICAGO	2	0	0	0	2
CLEVELAND	0	0	0	0	0
DALLAS	3	0	1	0	2
DENVER	1	0	1	0	0
DETROIT	39	0	4	12	23
KANSAS CITY	32	0	6	8	18
LAS VEGAS	1	0	1	0	0
LONG ISLAND	0	0	0	0	0
LOUISVILLE	9	0	1	7	1
MIAMI	0	0	0	0	0
MILWAUKEE	7	0	6	0	1
MINNEAPOLIS- ST. PAUL	5	0	0	1	4
NEW ORLEANS	1	0	1	0	0
NEW YORK	7	0	2	4	1
NEWARK	4	0	1	3	0
OMAHA	4	0	0	1	3
PHILADELPHIA	16	0	3	8	5
PHOENIX	1	0	0	0	1
PORTLAND	0	0	0	0	0
ST. LOUIS	8	0	4	1	3
SALT LAKE CITY	0	0	0	0	0
SAN DIEGO	0	0	0	0	0
SAN FRANCISCO	2	0	1	0	1
SEATTLE	0	0	0	0	0
WASHINGTON, D.C.	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	157	2	35	53	69