

# Colorado weighs difficulties of pot regulations

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In this Friday, Nov. 19, 2010 picture, samples of marijuana are tested in an oven at Full Spectrum Laboratories in Denver. "You don't go into a Walgreens with a headache and put on a blindfold and pick something off a shelf. But that's what some people are doing when they buy marijuana," said Buckie Minor of Full Spectrum Laboratories, which currently does voluntary marijuana analysis for about 100 growers and dispensaries. Minor and others in the pot business say industry standards are needed. But Colorado officials are having a tough time writing regulations for a product that's never been scrutinized or safety-tested before. (AP Photo/Ed Andrieski)

(AP) -- What's in that joint, and how can you be sure it's safe?

Colorado is working toward becoming the first state to regulate production of medical marijuana. Regulators say [pot](#) consumers deserve to know what they're smoking, and producers should have safety

regulations such as pesticide limits for plants destined for human consumption.

Right now, patients have no way to verify pot-shop claims that certain products are organic, or how potent a strain might be.

"You don't go into a Walgreens with a headache and put on a blindfold and pick something off a shelf. But that's what some people are doing when they buy marijuana," said Buckie Minor of Full Spectrum Laboratories in Denver, which currently does voluntary marijuana analysis for about 100 growers and dispensaries.

Minor and others in the pot business say industry standards are needed. But Colorado officials are having a tough time writing regulations for a product that's never been scrutinized or safety-tested before.

New Mexico requires marijuana products to be labeled by strain and potency, and is planning by the end of the year to allow health inspectors to review samples. But currently none of the 14 states that allow medical marijuana regulate how it's grown.

"There's no experience with this," said Dr. Alan Shackelford, a Denver physician heading up Colorado's effort to write labeling and safety regulations for medical marijuana.

Colorado hopes to have in place by early next year some sort of labeling and inspection standard for marijuana sold commercially, under provisions of a new state law. But it's a daunting task. Physicians, pot shop owners and state regulators all say standards are needed but guidelines don't exist. Some of the questions:

-Should marijuana sellers be able to attach medical claims to their products? What if no research exists to back up a claim that a certain

strain of pot is best for, say, pain or nausea?

-Should medical pot be labeled by potency? Patients using over-the-counter and prescription drugs can read the medicine's ingredients, but no analogy exists for pot's active ingredient, delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC.

-What about chemicals, such as [pesticides](#) or fertilizers, used on marijuana plants? Should those be limited, as they are for food and tobacco?

-Agencies that routinely inspect farms, restaurants and pharmaceutical factories have no experience regulating pot. Can they be tapped to inspect marijuana grows?

-What happens if someone gets sick from [medical marijuana](#)? Should growing operations have guidelines to limit contamination, such as mildew and mold?

"Given the lack of USDA or other oversight of this agricultural industry, we're at square one," Shackelford said when introducing proposed regulations recently.

According to regulators and physicians on the committee to establish regulations under the new law, the recommendations are likely to include basic labeling requirements, including potency. The regulations are also likely to call for pot growers to submit random samples for state testing, and rules for labeling pot products "organic."

Shackelford says he'll borrow from federal tobacco regulations for limits on chemicals that can be used in material to be smoked or ingested.

The regulations will also likely include the nation's first guidelines for

the safe production of hashish, which is concentrated marijuana. Hash production can be a fire risk because it's often prepared using butane, and sometimes hash is made using plastics that can leave unsafe carcinogens as residue.

Matt Cook, who leads the Department of Revenue committee considering the new regulations, conceded that state regulators face a challenge overseeing the state pot supply.

"How do I enforce this?" Cook asked Shackelford when the doctor was talking about limiting pesticide use on the plants. "I just don't want to create something that creates a regulatory nightmare for all of us."

But the so-called "ganjapreneuers" working in the [marijuana](#) business say that regulation and safety standards are needed.

"Patients are definitely interested to get as much information as they can about what they're ingesting," Minor said.

**More information:**

Colorado Department of Revenue marijuana guidelines:  
<http://tinyurl.com/36t4hqt>

Full Spectrum Laboratories: <http://fullspectrumlabs.com>

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