

# Uruguay to start selling marijuana next year: official

October 21 2013, by Ana Inés Cibils

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Uruguay is planning to start selling marijuana legally next year, a top official said, though the Senate must still approve the proposed legislation.

The country is hoping to act as a potential test case for an idea slowly gaining steam across Latin America—that the legalization and regulation of some drugs could sap the cartel violence devastating much of the region.

"The illegal market is very risky and offers poor quality," National Drug Board chief Jose Calzada was quoted as saying in Sunday's El Pais newspaper.

The state "will provide a safe place to buy, a good quality product and, moreover, will sell at a standard price."

The government proposes to sell [marijuana](#) for \$1 a gram, slightly below the current market rate that runs about 30 pesos (\$1.40) a gram.

By putting the government in charge of the marijuana industry, which is estimated to be worth \$30 million to \$40 million a year, the plan aims to curtail illegal trafficking and the violence that comes with it.

The proposed law would allow people to cultivate up to six [cannabis](#) plants for their own use, belong to a membership club that could grow up to 99 plants, or buy the drug at pharmacies, with a limit of 40 grams a

month per person.

In August, the bill, which is backed by President Jose Mujica's leftist government, was passed by the lower house of Uruguay's legislature.

It now awaits action by the Senate.

"It is expected the project will be approved in the next two weeks" by the Senate health committee, bringing it forward for a full Senate vote, committee member Luis Gallo told AFP Monday.

The project "will be enacted this year and will take effect practically the first day of January next year," Gallo said.

Including time it will take to cultivate the plants and prepare the drug for sale, the system should really take off by the second half of 2014, Calzada was quoted as saying by El Pais.

There are still legislative hurdles to overcome, including allocating money to pay a new director for the Institute for the Regulation and Control of Cannabis, which wasn't included in this year's budget.

Opposition parties have also fought against the idea and a poll released over the summer found 63 percent of Uruguayans were against it.

Many opponents fear the legalization of cannabis would turn Uruguay into a pot tourism hub and encourage the use of stronger drugs.

But Mujica argues the current policies have failed and estimates Uruguay, a small country with just 3.3 million people, spends upwards of \$80 million a year on combating drugs but seizes just \$4 million to \$5 million worth of contraband.

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