

Testing for pot potency done in a legal vacuum

By Joe Mozingo, Los Angeles Times

The tech broke the bud of marijuana into small flakes, measuring 200 milligrams into a vial. He had picked up the strain, Ghost, earlier that day from a dispensary in the Valley and guessed by its pungency and visible resin glands that it was potent.

He could have determined this the old-fashioned way, with a bong and a match. Instead, he began the meticulous process of preparing the sample for the high-pressure liquid chromatograph.

His lab, called The Werc Shop, tests medical cannabis for levels of the psychoactive ingredient known as THC and a few dozen other compounds, as well as for contaminants like molds, bacteria and pesticides that marijuana advocates don't much like to talk about. The strains that pass muster are labeled Certified Cannabaceuticals, a trademarked term.

The commercial lab is one of dozens opening in the last two years, as a rush to build an industry around medical marijuana has produced a desire – by some – to know what exactly is in the medicine.

The idea is that patients don't pop a Vicodin not knowing if the pill has 5 milligrams of hydrocodone or 15. Nor do people make drinks wondering if they are pouring beer or bourbon or Bacardi 151.

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