

Breath test being developed to detect pot

By Melissa Santos, News Tribune

A team at Washington State University is working to develop a breath test that could quickly determine whether a driver is under the influence of marijuana.

Law enforcement officers already use preliminary breath tests in the field to estimate drivers' blood alcohol content. But no similar portable tool exists to test for marijuana impairment via a breath sample.

Stoned drivers have become an increasing concern since Washington voters legalized recreational use of marijuana in 2012. A quarter of blood samples taken from drivers in 2013, the first full year the initiative was in effect, came back positive for pot.

WSU chemistry professor Herbert Hill said that existing technologies – including those already used by airport security and customs agents to detect drugs and explosives – can be re-purposed to test breath for THC, the psychoactive component of marijuana.

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