

Oregon Adapts to Mild Marijuana Law

WASHINGTON, Dec. 24 (AP) —A majority of Oregonians approve of the state law that makes the penalty for possessing small amounts of marijuana to about the same as that for a parking ticket, a Drug Abuse Council survey shows.

The survey, commissioned by the independent, Washington-based council, was taken a year after Oregon became the first state to reduce penalties for possession of up to one ounce of marijuana from a criminal to a civil offense. Convictions under that law carry a maximum fine of \$100 but no criminal record or jail term.

The survey also indicated that there was no significant increase in marijuana use after the criminal penalties were dropped.

The survey showed that although 52 percent of the per-

sons interviewed showed no change in how much they smoked, 40 per cent of those using marijuana reported a decrease in usage. Of those who stopped using marijuana or never used it, 23 per cent cited a possible health danger as a reason while 4 per cent mentioned the possibility of legal prosecution.

Two years ago, the Federal Government's National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse estimated that 26 million Americans had tried marijuana and that 8 million used it regularly. Oregon became the only state to adopt the commission's recommendation to reduce criminal penalties for possession of an ounce or less.

"On the state level, there's been great confusion between the medical and legal debates about marijuana," said Robert

Carr, a program officer for the Drug Abuse Council. "There is increasing evidence that it may be harmful to use it. But we're claiming that it is no more harmful than alcohol, tobacco or caffeine."

Mr. Carr said the possibility of reducing penalties for marijuana possession was being studied by other states, including Minnesota, Vermont, Massachusetts and Washington.

The council said the survey consisted of 802 personal interviews with adults 18 years or older, "representing a balanced sample of the state's population."

Of those surveyed, 32 per cent favored the existing law, 15 per cent said possession of small amounts of marijuana should be legal while 11 per cent said the sale and possession of small amounts should be legal.

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