U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,
Firearms and Explosives

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www.atf.gov

OPEN LETTER TO ALL FEDERAL FIREARMS LICENSEES

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has received a number of inquiries regarding the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes[1] and its applicability to Federal firearms laws. The purpose of this open letter is to provide guidance on the issue and to assist you, a Federal firearms licensee, in complying with Federal firearms laws and regulations.

A number of States have passed legislation allowing under State law the use or possession of marijuana for medicinal purposes, and some of these States issue a card authorizing the holder to use or possess marijuana under State law. During a firearms transaction, a potential transferee may advise you that he or she is a user of medical marijuana, or present a medical marijuana card as identification or proof of residency.

As you know, Federal law, 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(3), prohibits any person who is an "unlawful user of or addicted to any controlled substance (as defined in section 102 of the Controlled Substances Act (21 U.S.C. 802))" from shipping, transporting, receiving or possessing firearms or ammunition. Marijuana is listed in the Controlled Substances Act as a Schedule I controlled substance, and there are no exceptions in Federal law for marijuana purportedly used for medicinal purposes, even if such use is sanctioned by State law. Further, Federal law, 18 U.S.C. § 922(d)(3), makes it unlawful for any person to sell or otherwise dispose of any firearm or ammunition to any person knowing or **having reasonable cause to believe** that such person is an unlawful user of or addicted to a controlled substance. As provided by 27 C.F.R. § 478.11, "an inference of current use may be drawn from evidence of a recent use or possession of a controlled substance or a pattern of use or possession that reasonably covers the present time."

Therefore, any person who uses or is addicted to marijuana, regardless of whether his or her State has passed legislation authorizing marijuana use for medicinal purposes, is an unlawful user of or addicted to a controlled substance, and is prohibited by Federal law from possessing firearms or ammunition. Such persons should answer "yes" to question 11.e. on ATF Form 4473 (August 2008), Firearms Transaction Record, and you may not transfer firearms or ammunition to them. Further, if you are aware that the potential transferee is in possession of a card authorizing the possession and use of marijuana under State law, then you have "reasonable cause to believe" that the person is an unlawful user of a controlled substance. As such, you may not transfer firearms or ammunition to the person, even if the person answered "no" to question 11.e. on ATF Form 4473.

ATF is committed to assisting you in complying with Federal firearms laws. If you have any questions, please contact ATF's Firearms Industry Programs Branch at (202) 648-7190.

Arthur Herbert
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[1] The Federal government does not recognize marijuana as a medicine. The FDA has determined that marijuana has a high potential for abuse, has no currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States, and lacks an accepted level of safety for use under medical supervision. See 66 Fed. Reg. 20052 (2001). This Open Letter will use the terms "medical use" or "for medical purposes" with the understanding that such use is not sanctioned by the federal agency charged with determining what substances are safe and effective as medicines.