

Legal marijuana goes on sale in Washington (Update)

July 8 2014, by Gene Johnson



Krystal Klacsan prepares artwork to be hung, Monday, July 7, 2014 behind a case displaying glass bongs at the recreational marijuana store Cannabis City in Seattle. When legal sales begin on Tuesday, July 8, 2014, the store will be the first and only store in Seattle to initially sell recreational marijuana. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

Washington on Tuesday became the second state to allow people to buy marijuana legally in the U.S. without a doctor's note as eager customers who lined up outside stores made their purchases and savored the

moment.

People began buying marijuana at 8 a.m. at Top Shelf Cannabis, one of two Bellingham stores that started selling the drug as soon as it was allowed under state regulations. Several dozen people waited outside before the doors opened at the shop in this liberal college town of about 80,000 north of Seattle.

Cale Holdsworth, 29, of Kansas, made the first purchase: two grams of pot for \$26.50. As customers applauded, he held his brown bag aloft and said, "This is a great moment."

The start of legal pot sales in Washington marks a major step that's been 20 months in the making.

Washington and Colorado stunned much of America by voting in November 2012 to legalize marijuana for adults over 21, and to create state-licensed systems for growing, selling and taxing the pot. Sales began in Colorado on Jan. 1.

Washington issued its first 24 retail licenses Monday. An Associated Press survey of the licensees showed only about six planned to open Tuesday. Some were set to open later this week or next, while others said it could be a month or more before they could acquire marijuana to sell.



Cannabis City owner James Lathrop briefly leans against the exterior of his new recreational marijuana store Monday, July 7, 2014, in Seattle. The shop will be the first and, initially, only store in Seattle to legally sell recreational pot when sales begin Tuesday. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

It's been a bumpy ride in Washington state, with product shortages expected as growers and sellers scramble to prepare. Pot prices were expected to be higher than what people pay at the state's unregulated medical marijuana dispensaries.

That was largely due to the short supply of legally produced pot in the state. Although more than 2,600 people applied to become licensed growers, fewer than 100 have been approved—and only about a dozen were ready to harvest by early this month.

Colorado already had a regulated medical marijuana system, making for a smoother transition when it allowed those dispensaries to start selling to recreational pot shops Jan. 1.

Washington's medical system is unregulated, so officials here were starting from scratch as they immersed themselves in the pot world and tried to come up with regulations that made sense for the industry and the public.

The rules include protocols for testing marijuana and requirements for child-resistant packaging. Officials also had to determine things like how much criminal history was too much to get a license, and what types of security systems pot shops and growers should have.



James Lathrop, right, the owner of the recreational marijuana store Cannabis City, checks out display case with glass bongs on display and an empty area awaiting actual marijuana, Monday, July 7, 2014, in Seattle. The store will be the first and only store in Seattle to initially sell recreational marijuana when legal sales begin on Tuesday, July 8, 2014. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

Washington law allows the sale of up to an ounce of dried marijuana, 16 ounces of pot-infused solids, 72 ounces of pot-infused liquids or 7 grams

of concentrated marijuana, like hashish, to adults over 21.

Brian Kost, a 45-year-old Bellingham man, was among the first in line at Top Shelf Cannabis, in an industrial area off of Interstate 5. He said he hadn't smoked marijuana in 17 years because he didn't like the hassle of trying to find it on the illegal market.

"With the chance to buy it legally, I just couldn't pass it up," he said. "I never thought I'd see the day."

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