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MADD Canada Releases

February 27, 2004

Canadians Want Drug-Impaired Driving Legislation
-- *New marijuana law opens door for toking and driving* --

Overwhelmingly, Canadians want to see new drug-impaired driving legislation and Mothers Against Drunk Driving is urging the Federal Government to immediately introduce measures that will accompany the loosening of marijuana possession laws. In a recent public opinion survey, nine in ten Canadians support 'creating new drug-impaired driving laws to keep the roads safe from those who will take and drive.'

In a SES national phone survey, 89.7% of respondents strongly supported or somewhat supported new drug-impaired driving laws. There were 7.7% of respondents that opposed new laws and 2.2% were unsure.

"This kind of public support clearly indicates to the Prime Minister that he should have safeguards in place as he is loosening possession laws," says Louise Knox, MADD Canada's National President. "There will be a huge problem created by this new law, when drivers are toking and driving, and police are unable to charge them with impaired driving. The Government is well aware of solutions that can be introduced tomorrow to ensure police have the authority and the means to properly detect, test and charge a drug-impaired driver."

"There is no practical reason why the Government needs to rush this marijuana legislation and place it above Canadians' safety on the roads." Mrs. Knox adds, "We are disappointed with the Justice Minister's statement that they will move on drug

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impaired driving at sometime down the road – it's kind of like talking about fitting a harness after you've let the horse out of the stable."

With the passage of C-10 and no accompanying drug-impaired driving legislation, MADD Canada believes the Government is increasing drivers' risk on the roads and, at the same time, not providing for appropriate police enforcement. It cites an Ottawa case in which a person was acquitted even though he was smoking marijuana while driving. In this case, the judge stated there was not enough evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the accused was impaired. Mrs. Knox observes, "This opens the door for increased impaired driving trips, and the potential for even greater human carnage as a result of impaired driving."

"Public support for this initiative is remarkable," remarks Nik Nanos of SES, who conducted the national survey. "Canadians are concerned about the ramifications of people toking and driving -- no one wants to be a victim of an impaired driver. It is a public safety, no-nonsense issue that has resonated with the people."

The survey question read: 'The federal government is decriminalizing marijuana and loosening the possession laws without introducing drug-impaired driving measures. Police and groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving are calling for new drug-impaired driving legislation that will allow police to effectively apprehend and test drug-impaired drivers. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose creating new drug-impaired driving laws to keep the roads safe from those who will take and drive?'

The survey was part of the SES National Survey, conducted late January, with a sample of 1,000 Canadians. The results are accurate within 3.1 percent, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

MADD Canada has been active in voicing its opposition to Bill C-10, along with national police partners – Canadian Professional Police Association, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Canadian Association of Police Boards Association and the CEUDA, the Canadian union of customs officers. To read the Open Letter to the Prime Minister and for more information, visit the MADD Canada website – www.madd.ca.

For more information or an interview, visit www.madd.ca, or call Louise Knox, MADD Canada's National President, at: 1-866-900-6233 or 780-993-9160.