

Landscape Analysis: Examining the Illegal THC Market in Connecticut

DMHAS Cannabis Awareness and Education Team:

- Denique Weidema-Lewis, Program Manager
- Daniela Montes-Hawley, Lead Special Investigator



Today's Presenters



Denique Weidema-Lewis,
Behavioral Health Program Manager

Coordinate/monitor grants, distribute local mini-grant funding, provides oversight of the Be In The Know CT campaign, and develop program scopes and budgets, and liaison with other state agencies, committees and councils.



Daniela Montes-Hawley,
Lead Special Investigator

Leads the development of cannabis merchant education and is responsible for referrals to state enforcement agencies such as DCP and DRS.

DMHAS Cannabis Awareness and Education Program– Current Projects



Community Awareness

- Regional Capacity Building through RHBAO Coordinators
- 10 Cannabis Coalition grantees impacting 20 communities statewide



Retail Education

- Merchant Education
- Landscape Analysis
- Undercover Buy Inspections

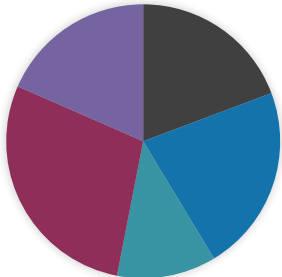


Policy Recommendations



Public Education

- Statewide Cannabis Prevention Campaign
- Safe Storage Cannabis Lock Bags



Data and Evaluation

- International Cannabis Policy Study

Presentation Overview

- **Our 'Why'**
- **Landscape Analysis Methodology, Process, and Data**
- **Considerations for Local Replication**
 - What to Expect in the Field
- **How to Report Establishments**
- **Current Cannabis Laws**
- **Q+A**

Our 'Why' for Conducting the Landscape Analysis



THC Beverages
(not found at endorsed liquor stores)



Familiar Looking Products



High Potency Products



Out of State Cannabis products not in
adherence with CT Cannabis law



Kratom



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Methodology

Purpose: Determine the types of cannabis/THC products including but not limited to edibles, vapes, flower/bud, and THC-infused seltzers available for purchase throughout the state of Connecticut

Sample Size: 358 retailers statewide

Target Audience Inspections: Tobacco, vape, and liquor retailers

Process: All information collected was documented data using a pre-loaded form in Microsoft Forms and later converted into an Excel spreadsheet.

Landscape Analysis Questions

Date

Licensed Products?

Establishment Name

Were there *THC/Cannabis products*?

Type of Establishment

What *type* of THC/Cannabis products were present?

Address

Town/City

Were *Kratom* products present?

Zip code

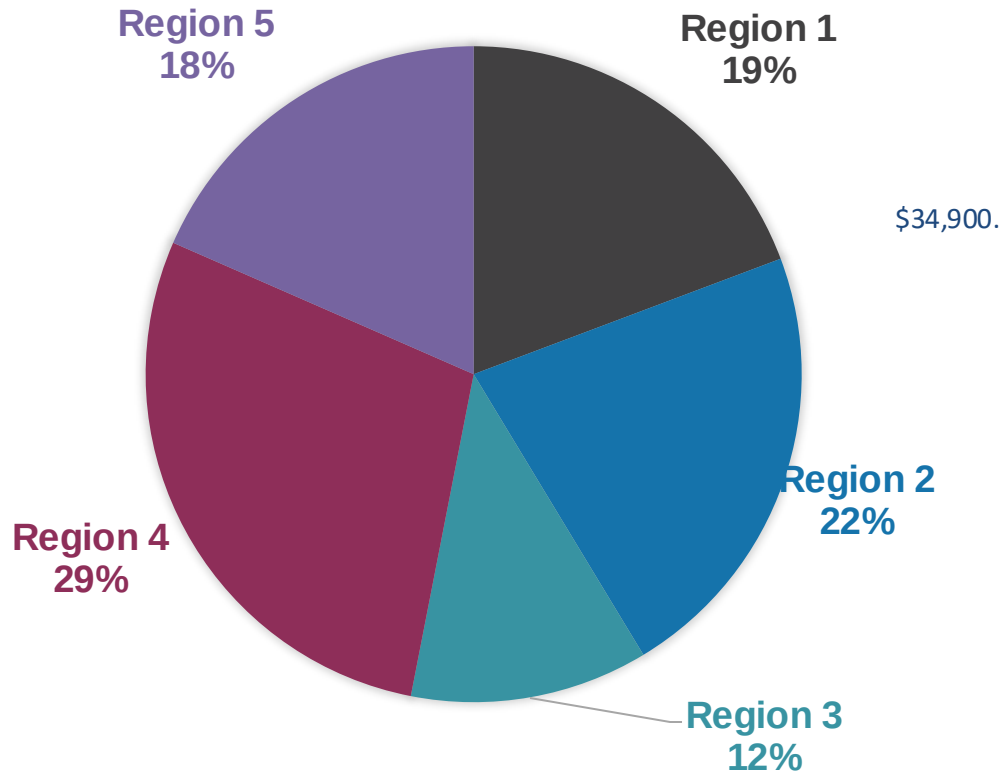
Were *Whip Its* present?

Reason for Incomplete Inspection?

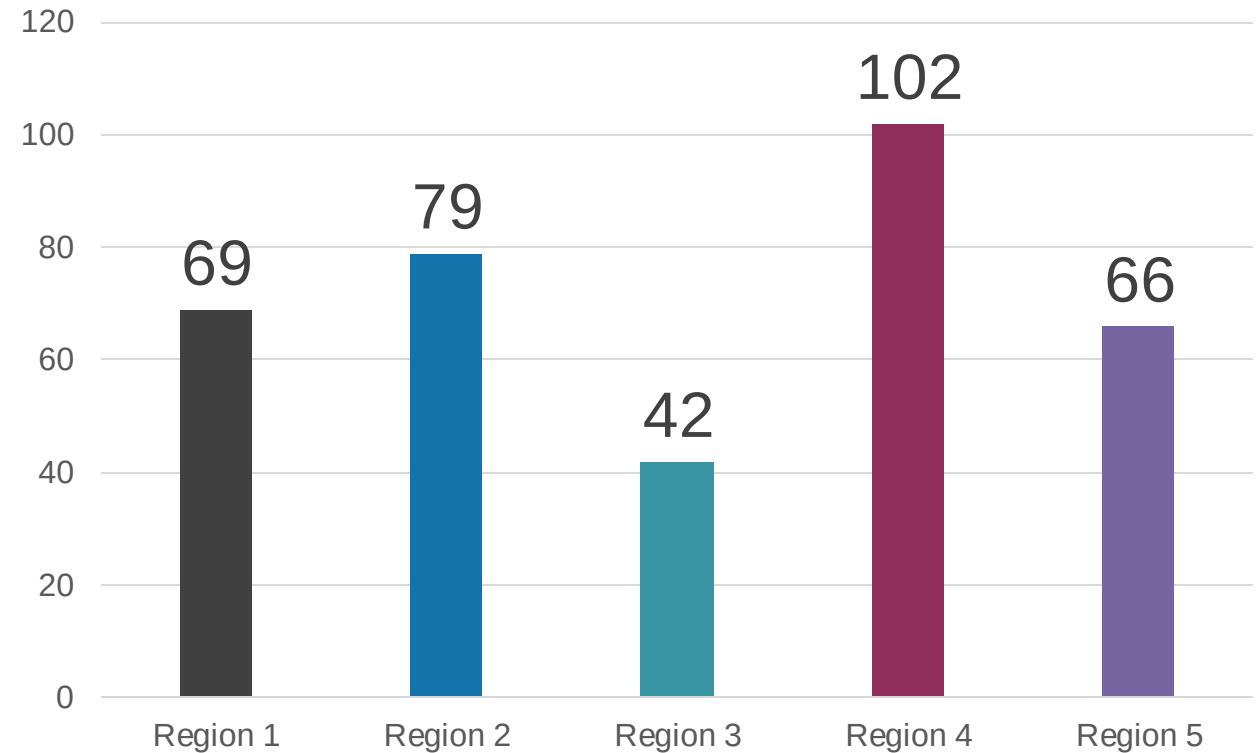
Notes

Landscape Results- THC

PERCENT OF ESTABLISHMENTS
BY REGION



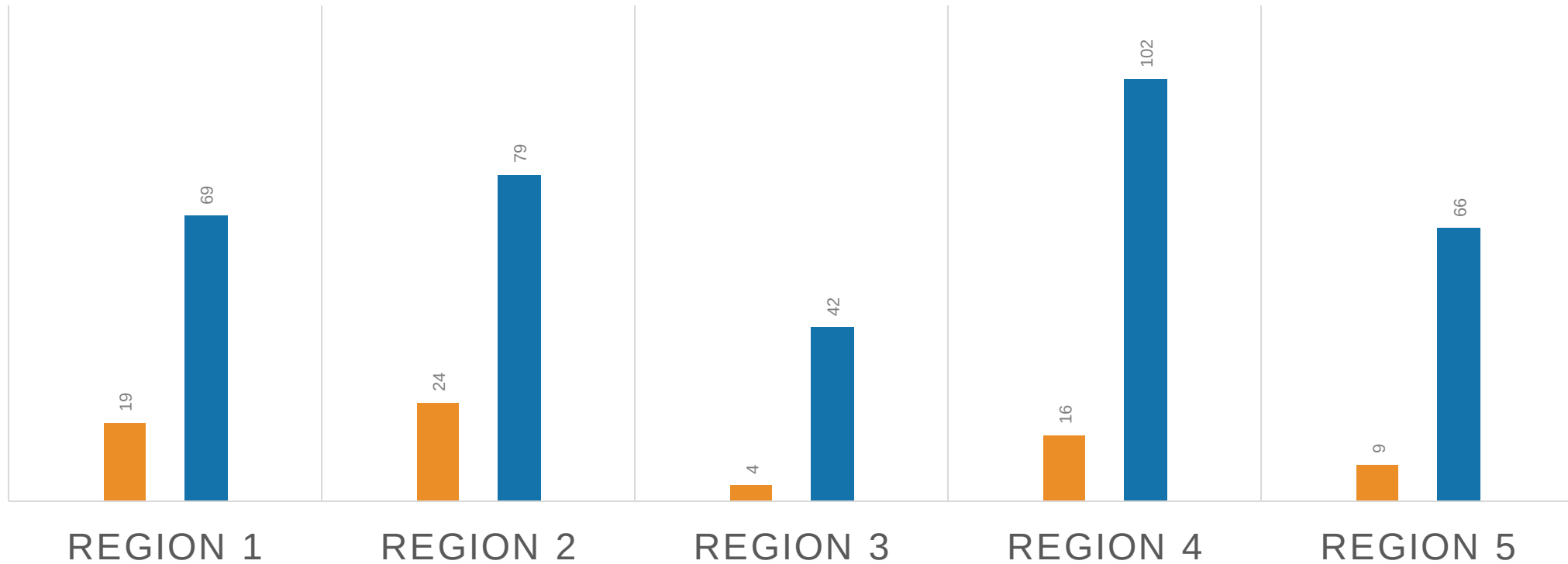
Number of Establishments by Region



Landscape Results- THC

THC BY REGION

■ Illegal THC by Region ■ Total Establishments



Landscape Results– The Five Connecticuts

The Five Connecticuts is a system originally developed by the University of Connecticut which uses socioeconomic trends such as poverty rate, household income, and more to categorize towns into five categories —

Rural- i.e. Portland, Ashford, East Windsor, Litchfield

Suburban- i.e. Fairfield, Westbrook, Salem, Ellington, Brookfield

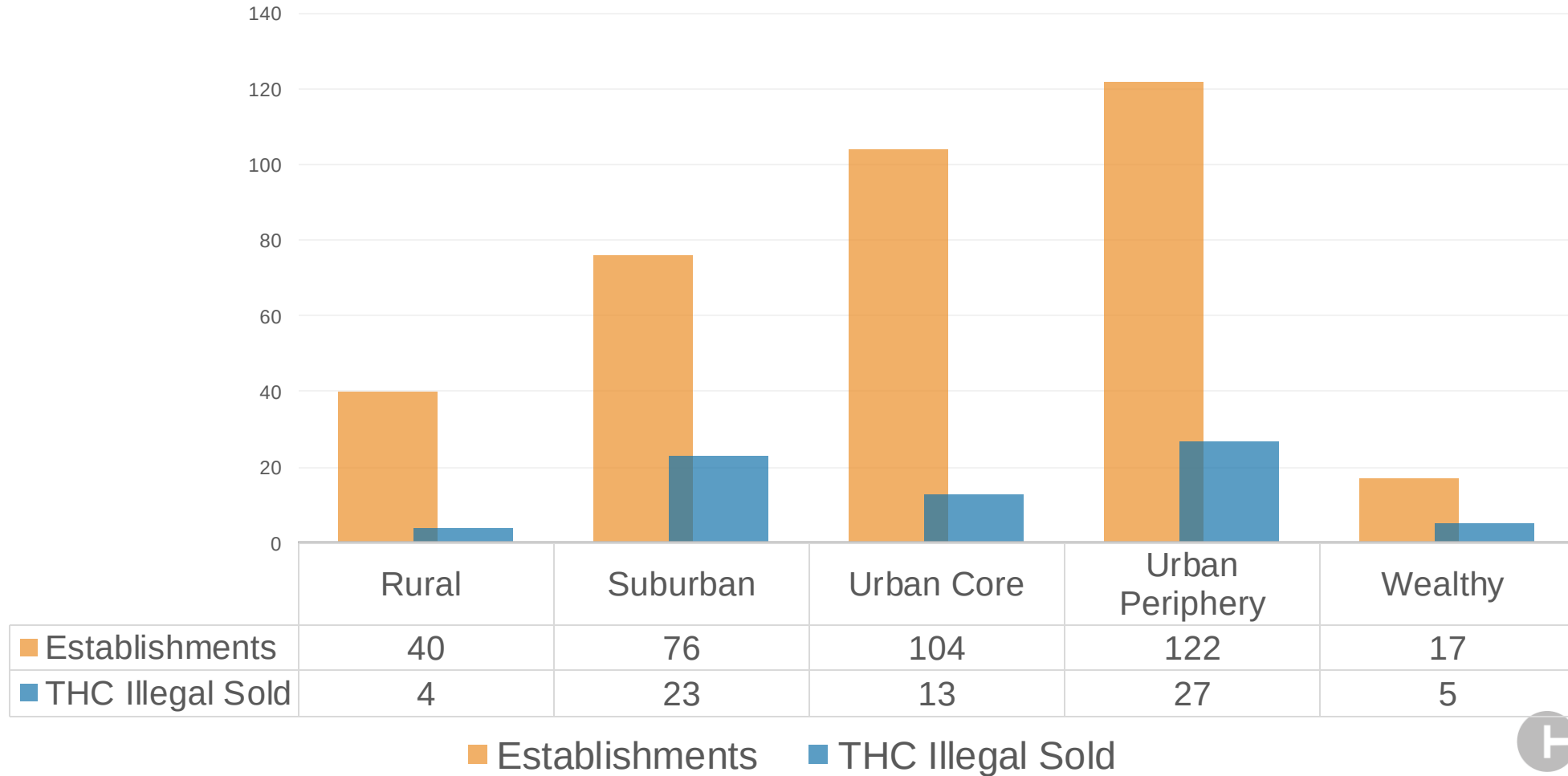
Urban Core- i.e. Bridgeport, New Haven, New London, Hartford, Waterbury

Urban Periphery – i.e. Stratford, Ansonia, Groton, Enfield, Danbury

Wealthy- i.e. Greenwich, Westport, Ridgefield

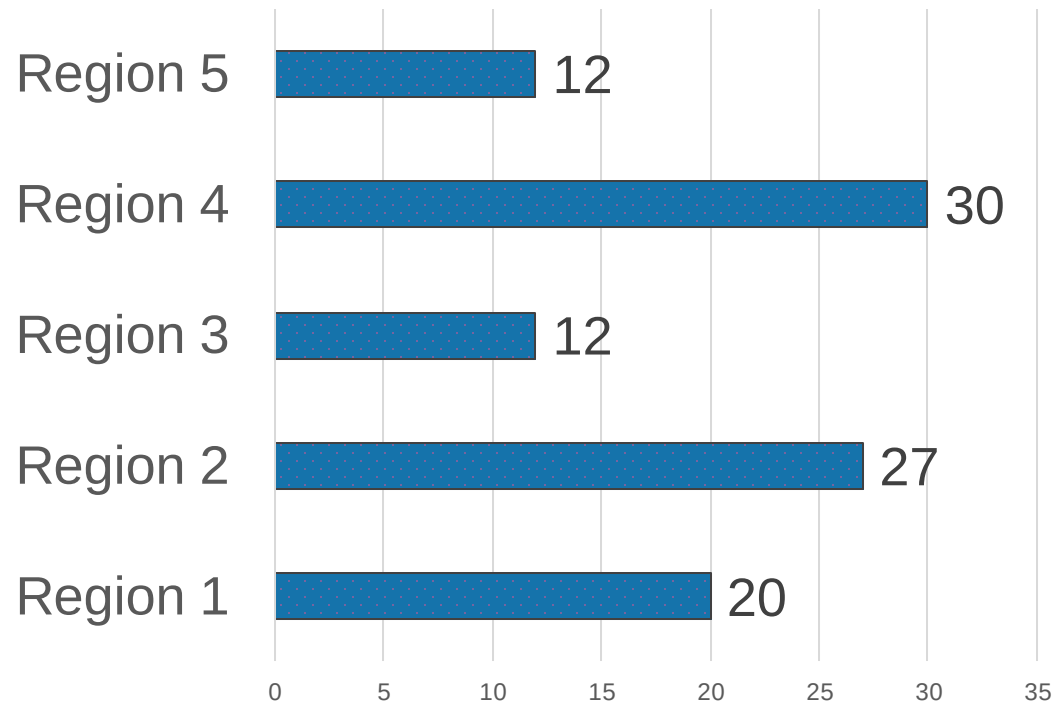
Landscape Results

THC by Five CTs

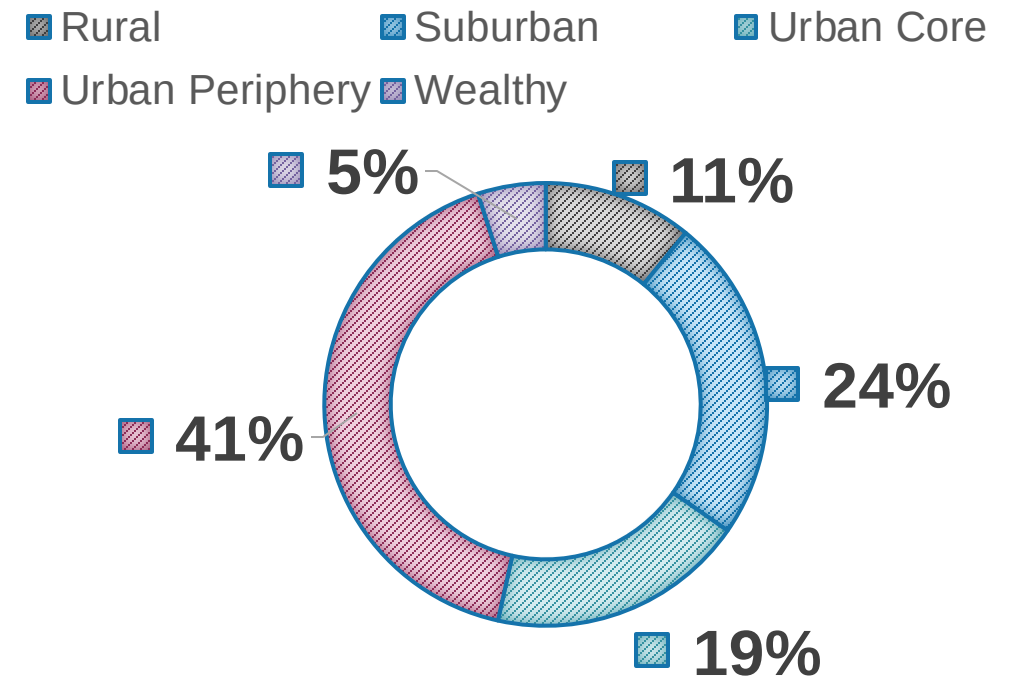


Landscape Results- Kratom

KRATOM BY REGION

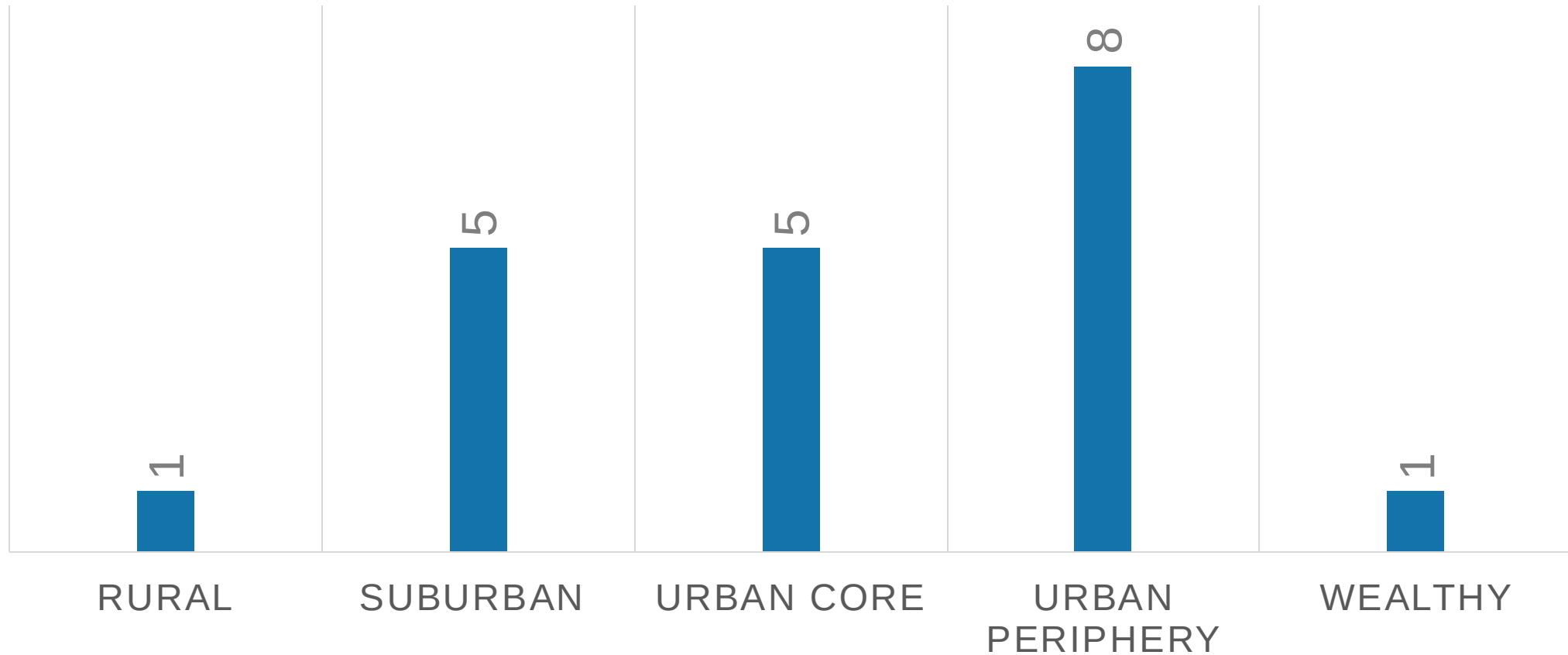


KRATOM BY 5 CTS

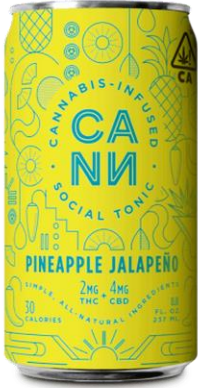


Landscape Results- Whippits

NITROUS OXIDE (WHIPPITS)



Cannabis Landscape Analysis Results



40

out of 117 liquor stores
(34%) were selling THC-
infused seltzers/energy
drinks



101

Establishments
(28%) were visibly
selling 'Kratom'



72

Of 358 establishments
(20%) are selling
illegal cannabis.



20

Establishments (5.5%)
were visibly selling
'Whippit's'



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Considerations for Local Replication

What to Expect in the Field– Scenario

You enter a vape shop. You ask for a cannabis product and the merchant asks, “You’re not with the State, are you?”

How would you answer?

What to Expect in the Field

Safety is the number one priority. Always conduct scans of physical locations in pairs or groups. If a location feels unsafe, it is OK to leave.

Clerks often ask:

- What are you looking for/ How can I help you?
- Do you smoke? What do you smoke?

The simple way to address clerks is that you're *new to the area* and are *curious* to see what the business offers or that you're just browsing for now.

Keeping your *anonymity* and *good relationship* with community businesses is important. You are more than welcome to ask clerks what they have for THC products, but more often than not, they will have products visible.

How to Report Establishments

How do we partner?

Daniela.Montes@ct.gov

How to check if establishments have endorsements to sell products?

elicense.ct.gov

How to report illegal cannabis?

dcp.cannabis@ct.gov



Current Cannabis Laws

Infused Beverages

Effective October 1, 2024:

- Cannot contain more than 3mg THC per container.
- Container cannot be less than 12 fluid ounces.
- Cannot be sold in packs of more than four containers.
- Can only be sold to customers at licensed cannabis retail establishments or packages stores with an endorsement to sell infused beverages.



Synthetic Cannabinoids

(PA 23-79, PA 24-115)

Public Act 23-79 prohibited the sale of synthetic cannabinoids in Connecticut.

- Synthetic cannabinoids are artificial cannabinoids that are chemically produced and may be dangerous.
- Legally defined as "any material, compound, mixture or preparation which contains a substance and acts as a naturally occurring cannabinoid that is produced artificially and not derived from an organic source naturally containing cannabinoids."
- Examples of synthetic cannabinoids include, but are not limited to, HHC, HXC, THC-O, THCP, etc

Public Act 24-115 prohibits synthetic cannabinoids by classifying them as Schedule I controlled substances (as of 6/4/24) HC-JD and others.



Moderate THC Hemp Products

- Cannot contain synthetic cannabinoids
- Cannot be packaged, presented or advertised in a manner that is likely to mislead a consumer by incorporating any statement, brand, design, representation, picture, illustration or other depiction that:
 - (1) Bears a reasonable resemblance to trademarked or characteristic packaging of a cannabis product or a commercially available product other than a cannabis product; or,
 - (2) implies that the manufacturer hemp product is a cannabis product, a total THC of more than 0.3% on a dry-weight basis or is a high-THC hemp product.



Questions?

BE IN THE KNOW CANNABIS CT



As you may know, April 20th is known as a day to celebrate and promote the use of cannabis. We know that teenagers and young adults might be particularly swayed by 420 marketing, which is why we're reaching out with tools to counter these messages. Be In the Know, has created messaging and campaign materials you can leverage with your audiences in English and Spanish:

- Graphics and copy for social media posts
- Posters
- Fact sheets

Note: you will need to opt in to download materials. If you need any support using the materials, please email your Regional Cannabis Coordinator.

Let's Stay in Touch!

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Be in the Know CT toolkit

Regional Cannabis Coordinators

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