

Book Review (November 2021) by [David Asper, Q.C., Manitoba lawyer](#)

The second edition of Cannabis Law (Thomson Reuters) evolves from the first edition, with new content reflecting myriad updated developments in the legal recreational and medicinal cannabis regulatory regime in Canada. It is a must read for anyone interested in or involved with the cannabis business.

Although it takes several chapters to make perhaps the biggest understatement in the book, it is nonetheless apt: *“As we have emphasized throughout this textbook, nothing about cannabis is simple.”*

In the days leading up to writing this review I received an email from a cannabis retailer offering seniors discounts, read about zoning concerns relating to the location of cannabis stores, read the settlement documents of the CannTrust class action litigation, saw an article in Chatelaine Magazine about cannabis gummies and how to eat them, and noted that media in Toronto were following the business story about a potential glut of retailers in the market.

I won't try to point directly where the new edition covers each of the above scenarios, but trust me, it does, and much more.

What I will say at the outset, with a sort of spoiler alert, was the head shaking reality in the new chapter that introduces edibles. In the good old days, some people would buy illegal marijuana, convert it to a THC infused butter, and then make cookies or brownies. There was a certain danger that made the process fun, and it led to the much more discreet eating of cookies versus smoking a joint. From a regulatory perspective, however, it's all business as retail edibles require food regulation on top of cannabis regulation. And then there's labeling.

It feels like piling on, but think about it, would you eat food purchased at a store that wasn't in some way regulated?

The book is written in as accessible language as is possible for such a densely regulated topic and it starts with a concise foundation of where we came from with prohibition.

Readers even get a hypothetical road trip with two Cheech and Chong characters created by the authors to illustrate the patchwork of provincial regulations. Who would have thought that federalism could be illustrated in this way!

If you want to know why your grandmother can't open her small container of Indica, no matter how many times she twists the cap, its covered in the book under packaging. As I read this part of the book all I could think of was that the people most likely to know their way around tough to get at packaging are teenagers and not the intended users of the product. Same as it ever was!

These examples might seem like minutiae, but they are parts of what's become a multi-billion-dollar business in Canada and increasingly around the world. It must also be remembered that eliminating prohibitions against cannabis is part of a huge social change that has only just begun.

By the time I finished the book I was already starting to imagine what might be in the fourth edition or beyond.

This is a landscape that's changing fairly rapidly. As a Manitoban, I can recall going to the liquor store with my parents when none of the alcohol was actually on display. They had to fill in a form at the front

of the location and a clerk retrieved it from a warehouse in the back. Now, of course, alcohol is sold like any other product, and one must ask whether this portends the future for cannabis?

It's not a merely rhetorical question. What the second edition of Cannabis Law does is not just inform. It leaves the reader with no choice but to digest the totality of a cautious, sometimes overlapping and confusing set of policy choices made by governments. I was left hoping that policy makers will read this book and use it to try and make cannabis regulation more coherent and in some cases more business and consumer friendly.

The risk of laying it all out as this book does, is that it could feel like reading the Income Tax Act.

Fortunately, the authors have stayed to the point in six Parts and 22 chapters, each of which adroitly tackles a single topic as much as possible. The information is very manageable. But the relentless narrative of regulation makes the book sometimes feel like that person who likes to talk a lot and, when you're trying to break away, they say "and another thing".

This turns out to be an important last impression that covers what the book accomplishes.

It's a metaphorical piano chord ending using all ten fingers and the damper pedal. It's the sum of the parts. That's what's been accomplished in this book and I highly recommend it to those who need to know what's up with cannabis in Canada.