A boulder rests on the road from a rock fall on Monongahela Boulevard. On each side of her pelvis and a bar placed in front of her pelvis that will be there until it heals.

A boulder rests on the road from a rock fall on Monongahela Boulevard.

“I don’t know whether it was the initial cut or when they widened it in the ‘60s that they really took the slope back very steeply. This is ultimately the problem with Mon Boulevard. They took it back so steeply that it just created an instability that has never come to an equilibrium.”

-Steve Kite, WVU geology professor

Rock fall on Mon Boulevard
Decades-old problem causes severe injuries

BY DOUGLAS SOULE AND DUNCAN SLADE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF AND PHOTOGRAPHER

Steve Kite, a WVU geology professor, said he used to try to inventory rocks of all sizes that fell onto Monongahela Boulevard.

“I gave up; it was so common,” he said. “Rocks coming down there of more modest size are so common that it just doesn’t make the news.”

On Monday, one did make the news. A falling boulder collided with a car and a PRT vehicle. Three people were injured, according to law enforcement reports.

Susan Cramer, 65, of Morgantown was the driver injured by the boulder. While the city had initially believed that all injuries resulting from Monday’s rock slide were minor, Cramer had a few broken bones and a collapsed lung that required surgery, said Morgantown spokesperson Michael Martin.

Two students were injured on the PRT. The injured students include Macaron Wheeler, an engineering student, and Chloe Bolin, an animal and nutritional sciences student.

The WVU Sigma Alpha Sorority is raising money for Bolin, one of its members, according to a post on its Facebook page. According to a post on the WVU Western Equestrian Team Facebook page, Bolin was a member of the team.

“She tailbone was broken all the way through and so the doctors inserted a large screw,” the Facebook post said. “She has two screws, one temporarily closed portions of the road. The [Division] of Highways crew plans to blast the boulder to remove it from the road.”

Kite said the boulder that fell on Monday is only a third or half the size of another one that fell in 1994. A more recent and more minor rock slide occurred in April 2018, reported The Dominion Post.

Kite said landslides used to occur more commonly in March.

“In recent years, it’s been more likely in January or February,” he said. “It’s been wetter in the winter.”

“Water on a hillside adds weight to the hillside, and also the pore pressure of the water tends to push the particles apart,” he said.

Monongahela Boulevard’s construction led the neighboring hillside to be steepened, Kite said.

“I don’t know whether it was the initial cut or when they widened [the boulevard] in the ‘60s that they really took the slope back very steeply,” he said. “This is ultimately the problem with Mon Boulevard. They took it back so steeply that it just created an instability that has never come to an equilibrium.”

Kite said another factor for landslide problems in the area is how the Monongahela River has changed over time.

“The river used to be at the level of Woodburn; it’s now 150 feet lower in probably less than a million years,” he said. “So the whole landscape is cut down. Everything is steepened.”

See Rock page 3
Could the Senate marijuana bill help address the WV opioid epidemic?

BY CRAIG WEIMER
CORRESPONDENT

The West Virginia Senate recently passed a bill to legalize plant-based marijuana for medicinal purposes. The bill is a mixture of various changes to state law, most of which being allowances provided to the Department of Health and Human Resources to notify authorities of the new regulations.

Having passed the Senate, the bill will now be presented to the House, where it will be put up for a vote.

Currently, West Virginia law only allows for medicinal marijuana to be dispensed in the form of pills and topical gels, creams or ointments, vaporization, tincture, liquid or patch.

The legislation may help to make marijuana-based pain relief more easily accessible, as smoking is currently the most familiar form of marijuana consumption.

In a state like West Virginia, considered by many to be the heart of the opioid epidemic, adequate pain-relieving substitutes for opioids may be helpful.

A National Institute for Drug Abuse study recently found that states with medicinal marijuana laws, like the ones recently enacted in West Virginia, experienced slower rates of increase in opioid overdose death rates.

“I think with what we know right now, it is helpful,” said Colin MacFarland, a biology student at WVU. “However, it needs to stand the test of time. I think that allowing plant-based marijuana will open up new medical opportunities for people.”

When the NIDA study was extended, however, the trend reversed. States with similar medicinal marijuana laws experienced higher than average rates of opioid overdose death, prompting some skepticism as to whether medicinal marijuana might help to cure the opioid epidemic.

Regardless, medicinal marijuana has been found to decrease pain symptoms in various studies, and a paper from the University of Washington has claimed that many chronic pain patients are switching from opioid medication to marijuana.

NIDA urges caution in regard to the treatment, stating that there is not enough research to make a conclusive statement about medicinal marijuana and opioid abuse.