

Cannabis cultivation booming in Britain but law enforcement hitting local supplies

13 March 2007

Cannabis cultivation is booming in Britain, with over the last six months production sites being raided at the rate of at least three a day. More than 100 cannabis farms have been closed down in London alone in the last two years, three times the amount shut down between 2003-2005.

The research, published by DrugScope in *Druglink* magazine today, reveals the staggering number of cannabis farms in operation, as police and cannabis growers adopt new tactics to detect and protect the crop.

Ten years ago only 11 per cent of cannabis sold in the UK was grown here, a figure that has now passed 60 per cent. [1] But the success of law enforcement hitting local supplies has led to a cannabis drought in some areas. In recent months there have been reports of cannabis being adulterated, apparently to increase its weight. [2]

Police say that 80 per cent of farms have more than 50 plants, with an average of 400 plants recovered per raid. Most set-ups are using simple growing equipment - over-head lights, fans and plant pots - with less than one in 10 farms using more expensive and technical hydroponic systems.

Analysis of nationwide police raids reveals around two-thirds to three-quarters of cannabis farms were run by Vietnamese criminal gangs. Initially thought to be restricted to the Greater London area, in the last year Vietnamese-run cannabis farms have been found in south Wales, Birmingham, East Anglia, Yorkshire and the North-East.

Many of the growers caught, some as young as 15, are illegal immigrants coerced into living in cramped conditions as payback for the gangs which brought them into the country. Police have found growers living in cupboards, tiny utility rooms and lofts to maximise space for plants. [3]

According to the London Fire Brigade last year 50 cannabis farms were discovered as a result of house fires, caused by faulty lights or re-wiring. [4] Police have also been alerted to presence of farms after neighbours have spotted burglars running away with plants.

Harry Shapiro, Director of Communications and Information at DrugScope and *Druglink* editor said:

"Growing cannabis commercially near the point of sale can dramatically increase profits, but this increases the risk of detection. There are significant implications for police resources in trying to keep up with the growers who are becoming increasingly smart in establishing new farms and avoiding arrest. Dealers admit that law enforcement is far more capable of hitting supply in a market fuelled by local production rather than cannabis imports."

Notes:

- 1. According to the United Nations Morocco's cannabis crop - a key source of imported cannabis resin - has fallen by almost a half in three years due to a government eradication scheme.
- 2. Herbal cannabis was sprayed with silica in the form of microscopic glass beads used to make road paint reflective. Because of the possible respiratory damage through inhaling hot glass the Department of Health issued a public health alert on 16th January 2007.
- 3. Contrary to many reports, gangs usually opt for high-yield plants, with an early flowering time, rather than grow super strength skunk.
- 4. The electricity meter is usually bypassed to power high intensity lamps without raising suspicion from suppliers. One cannabis farm found by police had been wired to nearby street lamps. Many farms are detected by using handheld or helicopter-mounted heat seeking devices.

Posted: 13th March 2007

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