

Humbolt Marijuana Problems, Arcata PD

I believe we currently have three dispensaries in our city. They have been fairly quiet in recent years in terms of reports of conduct associated with suspected street level crime. There have been very few reports of marijuana linked to dispensaries hitting the streets. I can only guess they are either playing by the rules, or perhaps it could be there is so much marijuana in our area that the crooks can get cheaper marijuana elsewhere. I'm not sure of the correct answer to that question.

Some dispensary owners have called me in the past with invitations to visit and I have always declined. A few years ago an attorney (who is a former prosecutor) representing one of the dispensaries called me to ask if I would serve on their board of directors to which I politely declined. For the dispensary operators who have called me, I have always made it clear our department will investigate any report of suspected criminal conduct. But I don't think they are too worried about state charges, as our DA and courts have typically not charged cases associated with Prop 215 issues. However, I would not be surprised if they would fear a visit from the DEA or IRS!

We have always had at least one dispensary since prop 215 was first enacted. Our City Council passed one of the first ordinances in the state supporting the intent of the Proposition 215 legislation. While the ordinance could only direct staff to comply with state law, the pundits have tried to "spin" it over the years to give people an impression our officers are prohibited from enforcing marijuana related H&S Code violations. Not true!

While the dispensaries do not seem to be causing us any significant problems on our streets, the issue of marijuana in general is a HUGE problem for our area. The problem issues include:

- Most law enforcement officers I know believe Humboldt County has a countless number of marijuana grow operations where huge profits are being made under the cloak of the Proposition 215 defense.
- Armed home invasions at indoor grows have become rather common. Bay area gangsters have learned that Humboldt marijuana trades well for white powder and other illicit items back home, and they have been quite willing to take this very high grade of marijuana by force.
- Marijuana seems to be extremely popular with our high school and even middle school youth populations.
- Arcata is believed to have so many "215" indoor grow houses, that even people who claim to be politically "progressive" are starting to complain that grow houses have removed an alarming number of homes from the affordable housing market.
- On every April 20th our Redwood Park becomes packed with marijuana aficionados who gather to celebrate "420 Day". When the weather is good, we can usually expect from 1,000 to 2,000 people who all "toke up" at 1620 hrs. It is a huge mess and headache for me and my staff.
- Humboldt State University is located within our city. The University is experiencing a critical enrollment shortage which is translating into drastic cuts in their operating budget. The University administration attributes the marijuana stigma of our area as a major factor that can be attributed to the enrollment decline.

Our city staff is currently studying strategies to get rid of the negative marijuana stigma. It's going to be a very long journey before we will shed away that reputation, which I attribute to some of the following factors:

- We are located within Humboldt County where the climate, remoteness from Federal law enforcement, and political conditions are conducive to pro marijuana issues.

- Many of our past political leaders have publicly supported pro-marijuana causes as "victimless crimes".
- The past budget crisis reduced officer staffing to the point to where we had minimum or even no resources to work marijuana related cases. While we were struggling just to maintain minimum staffing for the patrol shift, the " marijuana wave" literally washed over the top of us!

I am very pleased to see the CPCA Task Force is taking shape to address this issue. I hope you include the scope of research to include the problem of indoor "215" grows within our cities. I think Marty Mayer's recent client alert is a good starting point from which to address these issues. I look forward to hearing about any new ideas and strategies you come up with.

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