



## January 2005 Newsletter

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# Marihuana **GROW OPS!**

**Calgary Steering Committee**

### Illegal Marihuana Grow Operations

The statistics are staggering. In 2004, the Calgary Police Service received well over 800 tips of suspected illegal marihuana grow operations and over 425 Crime Stopper tips still remain to be investigated. Up until November 2004, they had taken down over 179 grow operations, seizing over 68,000 marihuana plants with a value of almost \$83 million. There are an average of 300 - 400 plants in each grow house, with the average crop yielding upwards of \$300,000 and growers can harvest 3 crops per year. Not one community is immune – grow houses are found in every Calgary community, from estate to middle class to low income. This is big business. Even more worrisome are the ties in varying degree to organized crime including home invasions, homicides and street gang activity. Profits are used to finance other illicit activities including the importation and manufacturing of cocaine, crack cocaine and methamphetamine. Although they have made considerable progress in taking down a significant number of these grow operations, Police acknowledge that they cannot continue this fight on their own.

Of very serious concern is the threat to the health and safety of our citizens and the neighborhoods where they reside. Typically, extensive crude, amateur modifications and bypasses to electrical connections pose significant fire hazards and the risk of neighborhood blackouts; modifications to water heaters to divert exhaust back into the house are made to increase carbon dioxide levels to accelerate crop growth; redirecting vents into sewer systems rather than outside the house as well as the disposal of dangerous, volatile chemicals into drainage systems, and the growth of toxic black mold and fungus all pose considerable risks to the environment.

Investigations of grow operations pose risks to police officers, firefighters, City and agency investigators and staff due to exposure to chemicals, weapons, booby traps and the potential for house fires. Police estimate that the cost to investigate is from \$7,000 to \$10,000 per operation and their resources are limited. Financial impacts include theft of power – an average grow operation consumes 10 times the power used by an average home and costs the consumer \$15,000 per year for each operation. Also impacted are insurance and mortgage companies as well as a negative impact on property values. Bottom line – we pay the price in every way.

Other Canadian jurisdictions including Chilliwack, Surrey, Maple Ridge, Coquitlam, Port Moody and Port Coquitlam have taken steps to address the proliferation of illegal marihuana grow operations by enacting bylaws that allow municipalities to recover the cost of policing, fire services, inspections, costs to restore electrical/plumbing and heating to code, and make provisions for municipal safety inspections prior to resale of grow op properties. Some legislation puts the onus on landlords to report suspected marihuana grow operations with fines associated with non-compliance should one be discovered on their rental

property. They have made it difficult for the criminal element to continue to invade their communities and their message is clear – illegal marihuana grow operations are not welcome.

It is time that Calgary takes a leadership role to address the growing proliferation of illegal marihuana grow operations in residential communities. S/Sgt. Trevor Daroux, head of the Drug Unit, and I have struck the STOP MGO's! Steering Committee which we jointly chair. Our focus is to implement an action plan based on a multi-stakeholder approach to ensure safe streets and safe communities. The response from identified stakeholders to attend the inaugural meeting in November was overwhelming, with representatives from City Bylaw, Licensing, Hazardous Materials, Development Enforcement, Building Regulations, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Canadian Banking Association, CMHC, Enmax, Calgary Health Region, Calgary Apartment Association, Calgary Real Estate Board, Real Estate Council of Alberta, Justice, Crimestoppers, Calgary Block Watch, Safer Calgary, the Federation of Calgary Communities, Community Association representatives, and community impact advocates – together over 30 people were in attendance. Discussion centered on how to develop a variety of strategies that stakeholders can take back to their respective organizations, seek input, feedback, and buy-in. It was identified that strategies in the areas of communications, community education and awareness, addressing regulatory issues and penalties, and sentencing would be required to effectively tackle the problem and that all three levels of government had roles to play. A series of workshops are planned for the Steering Committee to fine-tune these objectives and to form working groups that will formulate specific go forward strategies that will attack the problem at all levels.

The prospect of outcomes from the work of this committed group of people is exciting. This collaborative strategy will enhance our effectiveness against this insidious scourge that is infiltrating the very heart of our community and attacking the fabric of who we are and our quality of life. I want you to be aware of the magnitude of this problem in the city of Calgary and in Ward 13, and I want you to know that this is not just a police problem. This is a community problem and we need your help at the community level to help us. Please email or call my office to participate in the community action teams.

**As always, you can contact my office regarding this or any civic matter at 268-1624, by email at [dcolley@calgary.ca](mailto:dcolley@calgary.ca), or through my website, [www.aldermandiane.ca](http://www.aldermandiane.ca). Alternatively, you can contact 268-CITY (2489).**