

Police seek public's help in detecting pothouses

The Halton Regional Police Drug and Morality Bureau is seeking the public's assistance in flushing out marijuana grow operations in local neighbourhoods.

The seriousness of pothouses in residential neighbourhoods continues to be a focus of police services across the country, said Halton police spokesman Sgt. Val Hay.

"The hazards from bypassed hydro meters have caused fires in some jurisdictions and the damage done inside the homes has created safety and insurance issues," she said.

"The theft of the hydro is estimated at \$15,000 per marijuana grow. Generally one grow operation can use the hydro equivalent of 20 houses."

The following are some tips for what to look for in determining the existence of a grow house:

- Windows are covered with black plastic, heavy curtains pressed against the windows or blinds that are tightly shut.
- Humidity in the house causes condensation on windows.
- The smell of rotting cabbage or skunk-like odor, mixed with a sweet vegetative smell. Artificial scents may be used to mask the smell.
- Some of the electrical components in an indoor grow operation create humming sounds, familiar to a transformer on a hydro pole — other sounds may include fans and trickling water.
- High intensity, 1,000 watt lamps are normally used.
- Neighbourhood residences experience unexplained power surges or power "browning" with the return of normal power flow approximately 12 hours later.
- Growers sometimes leave equipment laying around the yard, such as nutrient

containers, pots, wiring, soil, root balls, aluminum shrouds and PVC piping.

- Almost all marijuana growers use rental property so that they do not have to alter their own property to accommodate a growing operation. High humidity levels in indoor growing operations also cause a lot of damage to the house.

- Landlords may notice tenants insist on paying rent in cash and may have expensive cars, cell phones or pagers. These tenants are also very reluctant to allow landlords to inspect their property.

- When compared to the average homes in the area, neighbours may notice inconsistencies in visitors coming to and from

the residence, ranging from no visitors at all to frequent visitors for short periods of time. Visitors will often leave one person waiting in the car while another enters the premises.

Anyone with information regarding a suspected grow house is asked to call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.

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