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Illegal Grow Operation Safety for Fire Personnel and First Responders

The purpose of this bulletin is to provide information to fire personnel regarding potential dangers that may be encountered when involved with illegal narcotic manufacturing operations, such as marihuana grow operations and clandestine drug manufacturing operations.

A significant increase in the number of illegal narcotics operations found in domestic dwellings throughout Western Canada – including British Columbia (BC), has identified a need to prepare fire fighters and other first responders for the handling of such occurrences¹. In 2000, 44% of the marihuana cultivation incidents reported by police agencies to Statistics Canada occurred in BC². Between 1997 and 2001, BC experienced a 200% increase in the production of marihuana. The proliferation of illegal narcotic production facilities associated with this increase can pose an extreme fire and safety risk to first response personnel. Appropriate precautions must be taken at all times to prevent serious injury or death.

Safety hazards associated with illegal narcotic production facilities include but are not limited to the following:

- modified electrical equipment;
- electrical by-passes and high energy equipment;
- illegally installed alternate power sources;
- pressurized gas cylinders;
- booby traps;
- harmful mold spores;
- reduced oxygen;
- noxious gases;
- structural alterations;
- dangerous chemicals;
- violence and intimidation.

Police have identified signs indicating the existence of illegal narcotics operations. Any one or more of these indicators could mean potential risk to first responders and the general public. If fire personnel suspect an illegal narcotic production operation, local police and BC Hydro should be contacted, and if possible, public access to the site should be restricted.

Indicators of the existence of illegal narcotics operations include but are not limited to:

- covered windows;
- unusual visitor behaviour;
- condensation on windows;
- bright lights;
- guard dogs;
- smells and odours;
- sounds of electrical humming, fans or trickling water;
- localized power surges;
- residents appear rarely to be home;
- little outside maintenance.

For additional information on illegal narcotics production operations, refer to www.cisc.gc.ca, www.ocabc.org and/or www.rcmp.ca. For information about BC Hydro's *Electrical Safety Program for Fire Fighters* contact BC Hydro at (604) 590-8911 or toll free at 1-888-590-8911. This program is free of charge.

1 - Alberta Municipal Affairs, "Clandestine Drug Operations Awareness and Safety," 2004.

2 - RCMP, "Marihuana Cultivation in Canada: Evolution and Current Trends," 2002.

The contents of this Information Bulletin are not intended to be provided as legal advice and should not be relied upon as legal advice.

Information Bulletins are distributed to British Columbia Fire Departments, Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner and where applicable, other related agencies and authorities, in order to provide general information on fire-related issues.

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