



Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office

News Release

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SISKIYOU COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE NEWS UPDATE

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Sheriff's Office Illegal Marijuana & Illicit Drug Update

Search Warrants & Drug Raids Target Illicit Drug Operations

The Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) released the latest statistical data on illicit drug seizures made during 2017. Operating primarily on private property using search warrants, the Siskiyou Interagency Marijuana Investigation Team (SIMIT) conducted a series of counter-drug operations in unincorporated areas of Siskiyou County, mostly in Shasta Vista, Klamath River Country Estates (KRCE) in the Hornbrook area; Weed, Lake Shastina, Montague, Big Springs, Mt. Shasta Forest, Mt. Shasta, and Iron Gate (Copco Lake area), seizing approximately 21,758 illicit cannabis (marijuana) plants. The 103 search warrants served by SIMIT also resulted in the seizure of 3,046 pounds of processed cannabis, 23 firearms, and 3 THC extraction or "BHO" labs (concentrated cannabis). During the counter-drug operations, a number of greenhouses, growing nurseries, outdoor cultivation sites, and two indoor illicit cannabis grows were eradicated. Numerous criminal cases are being prepared for submission to the Siskiyou County District Attorney.

Most recently, SIMIT served 16 search warrants on September 28 and 29th in the Mt. Shasta Vista area, which resulted in the seizure of at least 1600 illicit cannabis plants and processed marijuana. Due to the volume of the processed cannabis, the tabulation of illegal products, found mostly in plastic baggies in preparation for transportation and sale, is still underway. An entire block of illegal cannabis cultivation sites were seized by SIMIT detectives, County Code Enforcement Officers, and a team of Siskiyou County Public Works personnel during the arduous 2-day operation.

The illicit cannabis plants (21,758) are worth an estimated \$261,096,000.00 on the retail drug market with a three pound per plant yield. The processed cannabis (3,046 pounds) is estimated to be worth at least \$12,184,000.00 on the illegal retail drug market. According to Sheriff Jon Lopey, "We are still seeing large-scale illicit cannabis grow sites in many county areas and these recent operations prove there is still a large-scale effort by many illegal growers to violate the law and existing county guidelines, which do not permit more than 12 medical cannabis plants. These 12 plants are required to be grown in an approved indoor structure. There is also mounting evidence of large-scale, organized crime efforts to finance the numerous illicit grow sites that have been observed or eradicated. On one site in the Yuba Mate Lane area, 2,985 illegal cannabis plants were seized on one parcel. On August 31, 2017, SIMIT and

other SCSO deputies and volunteers assisted the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation on a bribery, corruption, and drug trafficking case that netted a total of 13 arrests and over 1,000 illegal cannabis plants. The main suspect in that case is still in-custody and it is anticipated he and a co-conspirator will be prosecuted by the United States Attorney in the Eastern District.”

The SCSO and the Siskiyou County District Attorney’s Office formed SIMIT during 2016 and the team has assumed the primary mission of enforcing drug-related laws and the county’s marijuana ordinance on private property. The difference between this and last year is the fact the team is getting an early start on enforcing violations of cannabis cultivation laws and the corresponding county ordinance.

Thus far during 2017 and during the previous year, SIMIT investigators have encountered environmental damage inflicted by growers, including downed trees, garbage, raw sewage, illegal water diversions, chemicals and fertilizers used in cultivation sites, and other adverse impacts. Illegal campfires on land parcels have been detected along with a number of fire hazards associated with debris piles, fuels, and hazardous substances. CAL FIRE law enforcement officers have cited many fire hazard-related violations during several counter-drug operations.

According to Sergeant Jeremiah LaRue, “Major impacts of these illegal marijuana cultivation sites also include but are not limited to improper grading, human waste, run-off sediment, nutrients and fertilizers leaching into the soil and watershed; improper site development, illegal road construction, run-off into streams, rivers, and lakes, illegal stream bed alterations, water thefts, and other public health and environmental concerns that adversely impact water quality and natural habitats, potentially harmful to birds, fish, other animals.”

As a reminder to all citizens, the marijuana ordinance adopted by the county does not allow outdoor cultivation of medical marijuana plants in county areas and limits growers to 12 plants, which must be cultivated in a separate indoor structure meeting county specifications and requirements. It is important to note that it is estimated these illegal, outdoor marijuana sites, on private property alone, are expending up to 3 million gallons of water a day. According to Sheriff Lopey, “I would also like to remind my fellow citizens that we are not seeking enforcement against legitimate medical marijuana users or recreational growers in compliance with recently-passed Proposition 64, as long as those citizens comply with the law. Under Prop 64 or the Adult Use of Marijuana Act, recreational users of cannabis may possess up to six plants and 28.5 grams of processed marijuana.”

Another task force, the California Department of Justice-led North State Major Investigation Team (NSMIT), a regional team working with the United States Forest Service (USFS) and other federal, state, and local agencies, is tasked with curtailing illegal marijuana grow sites on public lands. NSMIT, including a detective sergeant from SCSO, is investigating illicit cannabis cultivation sites on public land (mostly USFS) areas of Siskiyou County and additional counter-drug enforcement operations are planned in the near future. NSMIT has also detected hazardous chemicals that threaten the environment in public land grows during their productive 2016 enforcement season. NSMIT worked with the Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP), a federal, state, and local team that conducted a series of drug raids in public land areas within the last month and most recently, this week in the Humbug area of the Klamath National Forest. To date, about 86,600 illegal cannabis plants have been eradicated and several arrests made. The plants seized, based on a three pound yield, could have resulted in about \$1,039,200,000.00 (\$1 billion+) on in illicit retail drug proceeds on the streets.

According to Sheriff Lopey, “We appreciate the information and support we are receiving from the Siskiyou County residents impacted by these illegal cultivation sites. I urge any citizen or group to contact me or another departmental leader if they have any questions about our existing ordinance or lawful

provisions of criminal law related to cannabis cultivation. Our ultimate goal is to gain voluntary compliance from non-compliant inhabitants of the county.”

In other illicit drug news, the SCSO, in partnership with the Siskiyou Against Rx Addiction (SARA) group, a multi-disciplinary group of health care, law enforcement, and other stake holders are working together to mitigate the rising tide of overdose deaths and other adverse incidents associated with opioids. During a recent Drug Enforcement Agency “Drug Take Back Day”, hundreds of pounds of prescription drugs were collected in various Siskiyou County sites. At the SCSO office in Yreka and elsewhere, over 800 pounds of prescriptions drugs were turned in by area citizens, which is a record amount. SARA has also provided SCSO and local law enforcement agencies with Naloxone or “Narcan,” an anecdote for opioid overdoses. Lieutenant Darrell Frost of SCSO has already started training SCSO and local agencies and local deputies and officers will soon have Narcan to help save the lives of citizens suffering from an opioid overdose. SARA is also working on other important counter-abuse strategies for opioids.

According to Sheriff Lopey, “This is a great program, we expect the Narcan anecdote to save lives in Siskiyou County, and our partnership with SARA is a great effort in response to the opioid problem in our county and nationwide. This is a good time to remind Siskiyou County residents that the Siskiyou Unified Major Investigation Team (SUMIT), a multi-agency counter-drug team made up of SCSO, Siskiyou County District Attorney’s Office, CHP, SCSO, Weed Police Department, California Department of Alcohol and Beverage Control, Siskiyou County Probation Department, and the California Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigations, which leads the team, has been working hard to rid the county of hard drugs, including opioids. During July and August, SUMIT made 20 drug-related arrests, including 15 felony violations of law. 14 arrests were made for heroin or methamphetamine offenses. During July and August 2017, SUMIT investigators seized 136.28 grams of methamphetamine (worth \$6,814.00), 188 grams of marijuana (worth \$1,880.00); 2.12 grams of heroin (worth \$212.00) and 300 ml of steroids were confiscated (\$1,500.00 value).

During 2016, SUMIT investigated 101 illicit drug offenses, made 96 felony drug arrests, and seized 46,957 grams of methamphetamine, 395 pounds of cannabis, 411 grams of concentrated cannabis, 3,835 grams of heroin, 4,813 grams of cocaine, and SUMIT confiscated 12,921 illegal pills, 400 doses of LSD, and seized 19 firearms. The value of the illicit drugs seized by SUMIT totaled \$3,928,377.00. According to Sheriff Lopey, “SUMIT is truly doing an outstanding job with its member agencies to respond to the overwhelming illicit drug problems we have within the county and it is also important to add that Interstate 5, US 97, and SR 96 are major smuggling corridors used by drug trafficking organizations. The CHP and other agencies have made numerous large-scale seizures on our highways in recent months. Thus far this year, SUMIT is on-track to exceed arrests and seizures made during 2016.”

Sergeant LaRue added, “Anyone with information about an illegal marijuana cultivation site is urged to contact the SCSO’s 24-hour Dispatch Center at (530) 841-2900. Citizens may also contact the Siskiyou County Planning Department (Community Development) to report suspected ordinance violations related to non-permitted structures, septic tanks, well issues, trash, fencing, and similar ordinance violations at (530) 841-2100. Citizens with information about illicit drug activities that are non-cannabis related such as methamphetamine, heroin or other illicit drugs are urged to contact SUMIT at (530) 842-8374, or the SCSO 24-hour Dispatch Center. Sheriff Lopey is also offering to conduct town hall meetings on request to further educate the public about marijuana-related laws or issues involving other illicit drugs. In partnership with the Siskiyou County’s Department of Health and Human Services, a youth anti-drug and safety program (DARE) will resume this fall in targeted schools to further educate our children about the dangers associated with illicit drug, tobacco, and alcohol use. The program also

discusses other topics such as bullying and how to fight back against the exploitation and abuse of children and how to identify and report such inappropriate behaviors to the proper authorities.”

Recently, the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to approve a proclamation declaring a “local state of emergency” in Siskiyou County due to the overwhelming number of illegal cannabis cultivation sites in the county on public and private properties, which present significant public health, safety, and environmental dangers to the county and its citizens. According to Sheriff Lopey, “This proclamation should result in additional support from federal and state agencies and I am working with our federal, state, and local law enforcement and resource management agencies to more effectively mitigate the catastrophic illicit marijuana problem that has taken a stronghold in our county. Additional resources are scheduled to arrive next week. I have discussed this issue with state and local officials and a meeting of North State sheriffs held on Thursday, September 28th, outlined some possible law enforcement mutual aid plans to collectively mitigate the illicit drug trafficking that currently is wreaking havoc and potentially catastrophic impacts in virtually all Northern California counties. I commend the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors, Senator Ted Gaines, and our county administrator, and many others for supporting our proclamation and our efforts to mitigate the illegal drug trafficking that has plagued our county for too long. We are attempting to stop lawlessness, preserve our environment, protect our most vulnerable populations such as children and teenagers, and we are honoring the countless calls for help from our citizens reporting numerous ‘quality of life’ issues impacting them in our county.”