

RESPONSE TO MARIJUANA CULTIVATION INCIDENTS

Historically, indoor marijuana grows have not been a threat to first responders as a HazMat or public health concern. Changes in modern society, however, have altered the roles and responsibilities for California Emergency Responders. These individuals now have to provide an “All Risk” response to marijuana cultivation incidents. Some departments may not be properly equipped, staffed, or trained to mitigate such incidents. Initial response personnel need to maintain a high level of situational awareness and possess the skills necessary for incident stabilization. Emergency responder safety is the highest priority. It is important to identify the needs of the responders in order to safely mitigate these incidents.

Incidents involving marijuana cultivation may include emergency medical assistance, fire suppression, and the rescue or recovery of victims. Coordination with law enforcement will be required. Collaboration with additional local, state, and federal agencies, including technical specialists may be necessary. Pre-incident training and preparedness drills should be conducted to build a close partnership with assisting and cooperating agencies. Effective unified command and interoperability includes good communication and strong working relationships with local agencies. Marijuana cultivation incidents may include: man-made hazards, crime scene preservation, unified command, perimeter integrity and control, incident within an incident, dynamic long term events, and significant logistical demands.

An important step in preparing for a marijuana cultivation incident includes the development of an emergency response plan. This plan should include a thorough and clear set of Standard Operational Guidelines/Policies/Procedures.

Initial Dispatch and Response for Marijuana Cultivation Incidents

- A response may appear to be routine based upon dispatch information until arriving on scene.
- An incident may appear relatively safe upon arrival, yet can change quickly.
- Initial and continuous size-ups are essential.
- Additional hazards presented with these incidents will guide/determine operational objectives.
- Law enforcement should be notified immediately.
- Appropriate PPE and safety considerations should be identified for all emergency personnel.
- Maintain LCES at all times.
- Many grow operators monitor radio frequencies; minimize radio traffic. Encourage cell phone use and/or face to face conversation.
- Gross decontamination should be conducted when necessary.
- Request response from Hazardous Materials Team and Technical Specialist when necessary.

- **Safety measures to remember:**
 - **Do not touch anything in the cultivation area.**
 - **Do not turn on/off any electrical power or light switches.**
 - **Do not eat or drink in or around a cultivation area.**
 - **Do not open or remove containers with chemicals or suspected chemicals.**
 - **Wash your hands and face thoroughly.**

Potential Hazards of Marijuana Cultivation Incidents

- Booby traps - Anti-personnel devices
- Violent occupants
- Weapons on site
- Aggressive animals
- Fire
- Structural damage
- Electrical system tampering
- Oxygen deficient atmospheres
- Environmental - mold, chemical use and foreign substances

Warning Signs of Potential Grow House Incidents

- Unusual Smell/Odor
- Condensation on windows
- Excess air conditioning units
- Rarely occupied home
- Unusually large electrical service or electrical wiring modifications
- Unusual waste such as fertilizer containers, soil amendments and pots beside a house that has no yard or an unkempt lawn
- Continuous sound of electrical generators or fans
- Indoor high voltage lights or excessive lighting
- Cameras, high fences, locked gates, heavy chains, boarded/covered windows, or unusually high security

Warning Signs of Marijuana Cultivations in Wildland Areas

- Marking and camouflage of trails
- Buried or disguised water lines
- Chicken wire or field fence in odd places
- Animal poison
- Messy campsites in untraveled areas
- Campsites with PVC, fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, gardening tools, and drip tubing
- Suspicious individuals
- No trespassing signs

Emergency Contacts

- Law Enforcement: Local/State/Federal
- Hazardous Material Response Team
- Building Department/Structural Engineers
- Environmental Health Department
- Medical Transport
- LEMSA - Declaration of MCI
- Fish and Game
- EPA
- Terrorism Liaison Officer

Non-Emergency

When personnel encounter cultivation sites during non-emergency situations, the following procedures shall be considered:

- STOP; take careful note of your surroundings.
- Leave the area the same way you entered.
- Mark the location on a map or record GPS location.
- Note descriptions of vehicles or people in area.
- Move slowly and do not change your behavior.
- Most growers carry scanners. Do not alert others via radio. Use cell phone or radio once out of the area.