

# GROW HOUSES



## AND THEIR EFFECT ON YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD



PALM BEACH COUNTY  
SUBSTANCE AWARENESS COALITION

# GROW HOUSES

## And Their Effect on Your Neighborhood

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## ABOUT MARIJUANA GROW HOUSE

A grow house is an indoor marijuana growing laboratory that may be inside any residential or commercial building that has been leased or bought by persons in the drug trade and turned into an indoor nursery or hydroponics operation to grow marijuana plants.

No community is immune from marijuana grow houses. They operate in virtually every county in Florida. They operate in our largest urban areas and in our smallest rural communities. The majority are found in residential neighborhoods, but grow houses have also been discovered in warehouses and commercial buildings. In large cities, police sometimes find a number of indoor grow houses in the same neighborhood — even on the same street.



Operators are becoming increasingly sophisticated. In order to prevent detection, efforts are made to make the building housing the grow house look lived in. Sometimes families live in the homes as "crop sitters"; while interior lights are placed on timers in other grow house to make it appear lived in. While some grow houses operate out of rented units, police have detected a growing trend towards owned single-detached houses where there is less likelihood of being discovered.

Grow houses range in size. They can be as small as a few plants in a one-room basement or as large as an entire barn or warehouse with more than 10,000 plants.



## COMMUNITY IMPACT

Marijuana grow houses pose a significant cost and risk to public safety in the communities where we live and work. Most residential grow houses are eventually abandoned with a great deal of structural damage so; they make the street look run down. Marijuana grow houses end up being an overgrown blight on the rest of the neighborhood inviting squatter and enticing youth to commit vandalism.



Indoor marijuana grow houses require massive amounts of water and electric. In order to prevent detection, growers redirect the systems that bring these services into the house and tamper with the meters that measure consumption. The cost to cover the higher consumption of electricity and water is passed along to all consumers. Diverting electricity and tampering with electrical wiring can lead to house fires. The use of extra exhaust fans in the grow house can accelerate the

fire increasing the hazard. This hazard extends to surrounding homes in the neighborhood. In some jurisdictions, one in eight emergency calls reporting a fire involves a grow house.

The re-venting of the air conditioning to circulate carbon dioxide to the marijuana plants can circulate exhaust fumes from the air conditioner back into the house. There can be a buildup of poisonous gases from the chemical nutrients used in the production of the marijuana crop. These poisonous gases are also vented outside and released into the neighborhood. The combination of solvents and sparks from the exhaust fans can cause an explosion. These illegal operations can bring criminals, weapons and violence into our neighborhoods. Growers sometimes arm themselves to protect themselves and their operation. A marijuana grow house related shooting occurred on Royal Palm Beach Boulevard last year.

## DAMAGE CAUSED BY GROW HOUSES

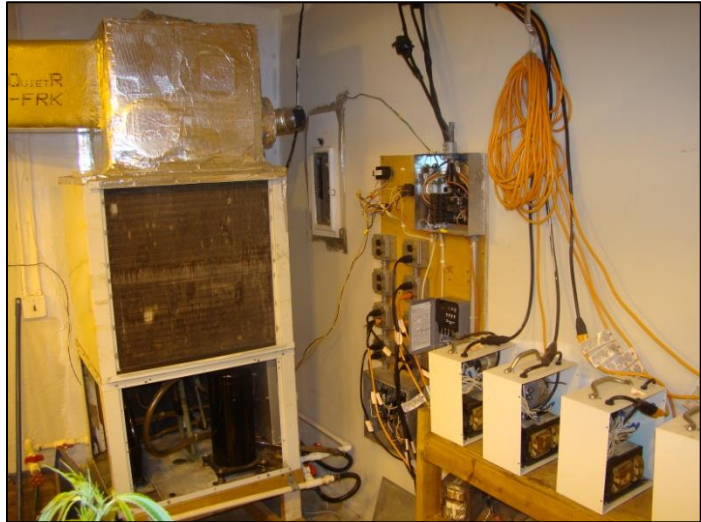
Indoor or hydroponic marijuana growers make a number of "modifications" to the property. These renovations have the potential to cause defects to the structure housing of the grow operation. Repairs can cost several thousand dollars, and in extreme cases, the house has to be completely torn down.

Large amounts of water are required to grow a marijuana crop. This may require modifications to the drain system. The large amounts of moisture required to grow indoors can generate a considerable amount of mold and spores. There are a number of noxious gases that develop in the process. It's also not unusual to find that pesticides have been used on the crops. Toxic



contaminants can remain in the air even after a grow house has been vacated. Exposure to indoor mold has been associated with exacerbation of asthma in mold sensitive people, and with increased upper respiratory disease.

An enormous amount of power is required to run a marijuana grow house. Non code wiring is connected up to the power source for the house, drawing far more power than a transformer is intended to provide. The lines are often bypassed the power meter to prevent the police and electric companies from identifying the dwelling as a unusually high consumer of electricity.



Uncovered electrical wires outside the house near the power meter are capable of killing someone who accidentally steps on them. Operators are generally not concerned with meeting electrical standards, and improperly connected cables create fire hazards. Heavy power usage wears out the transformers prematurely, which can result in fires months or years down the road. The foundation is often compromised in some way so that the electric can be hooked up behind the meter. Wiring and lighting are modified, overloading electrical systems and making the houses hazardous to entire neighborhoods. Power surges or outages can damage neighbors' electrical devices.

These damages are of concern to the insurance industry. Insurance companies take the view that illegal acts should not result in a damage payment or policy coverage. Many insurance companies have policy clauses that will not cover this type of damage. Persons renting properties need to be aware of what is happening in their units in order to protect their assets.

## **IDENTIFYING A FORMER GROW HOUSE**

Never assume the location is too bizarre or inconvenient to be a grow house. Police have found grow houses in new housing developments, in large and small homes, and attics, in high-rise apartments and warehouses. Marijuana grow houses have even been discovered in vehicles like tractor-trailers, campers, motor homes and even railroad cars.

Police have noted an increasing sophistication in illegal operations. Grow houses often require extensive cleanup and repair. It is possible that these repairs were never made and the real damage is hidden.



Noticeable signs that you may be dealing with a former grow house include:

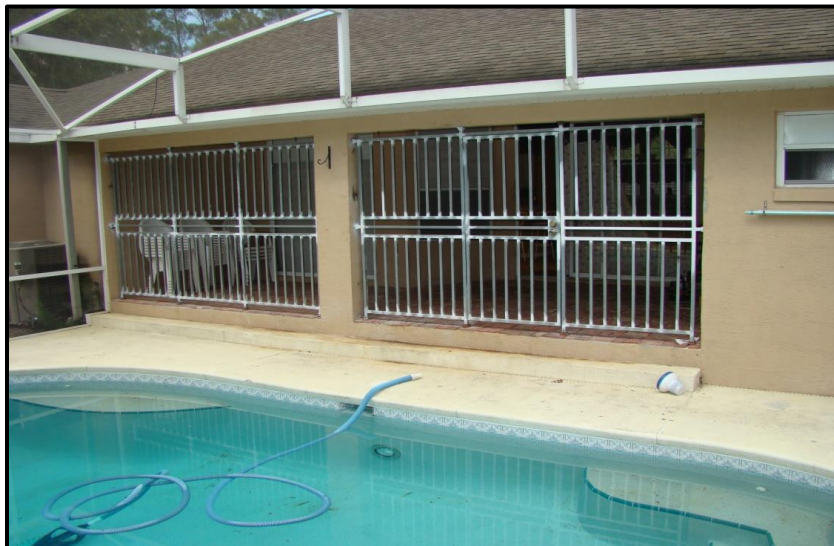
- Mold in corners where the walls and ceilings meet.
- Painted concrete floors in the basement, with circular marks of where pots once were.
- Evidence of tampering with the electric meter (damaged or broken seals) or the ground around it.
- Unusual or modified wiring on the exterior of the house or in the attic.
- Concrete masonry patches, or alterations on the inside of the garage.
- Patterns of screw holes on the walls.
- Multiple air conditioning units.
- Unusal PVC piping.
- Pool pump present when the house does not have a pool.
- Denting on front doors (from police ramming the door).



## IDENTIFYING A GROW HOUSE

There are a number of signs that a building may be used as a marijuana grow house.

- Buyer or tenant unloads unrecognizable equipment and very few household furnishings.
- Buyer or tenant unloads copper and/or PVC pipe, soil, halogen lamps, large amounts of black plastic aluminum ducting, and fans.
- Tenants come and go at unusual hours but never seem to stay overnight.
- Little or no garbage is brought to the curb each week.
- Mail is rarely delivered to the house, and the mailbox may be taped shut.
- Windows are always dark and may be secured with metal bars, blacked out or heavily draped.
- Strong and strange odors coming from the house.
- Heavy condensation on the inside of the windows.
- Humming sound of fans or generators.
- Condensation or discoloring on the roof
- Individuals arriving at the house to put out the garbage, move toys in the front yard, cut the lawn and then leaving immediately.
- People entering and exiting the residence only through the garage keeping the garage door closed.
- Excessive security such as guard dogs, "keep out" signs, high fences, heavy chains and locks on gates.



## WHY REALTORS SHOULD CARE

The rapid increase in the number of grow houses across Palm Beach County has raised questions about the disclosure responsibilities and potential liabilities of real estate practitioners in dealing with these properties — as listing agents, buyer agents, dual agents and property managers.

Realtors need to understand the issues surrounding marijuana grow houses and how to protect yourself and your clients. This section will help you to recognize situations where grow houses may be involved and provides recommendations on how to deal with them.

## IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL GROW HOUSES

Persons involved in the indoor growing of marijuana need to buy or rent real estate. What may seem like a reasonable request for a four-bedroom house in a quiet neighborhood may be just the right criteria a grower is looking for to start a crop. It's important to consider the whole picture when dealing with a client because anyone can be a potential suspect.

### *Tips for Realtors*

Keep an eye out for the suspicious activity such as:

- Third party purchasers.
- Questionable income sources.
- No contract negotiation.
- Offers to pay in large amounts of cash.
- Multiple cash transactions.
- Multiple down payments on behalf of one individual.
- Secretiveness and no reasonable explanations.



Be aware of clients who are financing multiple homes, and switching between first and last names for different transactions. Look for a common thread. For example, do you recognize the same clients buying multiple homes in the same neighborhood?





### ***Tips for Landlords and Property Managers***

Your suspicions may also be raised if you're negotiating a lease for a private home. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Did the applicant check out every room?
- Did the applicant provide proper identification such as a passport or driver's license?
- Have references been provided and do they check out?
- Did the applicant fill out the application on site?
- Does the applicant understand the terms of the lease agreement?
- Did the renter spend a lot of time viewing the breaker-boxes, wiring and plumbing fixtures?
- Will the applicant sign a lease with the following conditions?
  - No damage to premises.
  - No criminal activity on the premises.
  - Applicant will provide reasonable access to the landlord.
  - Maintain clean and tidy premises.
  - Criminal activity will result in immediate suspension of the lease.
  - No extra tenants without permission of the owner.
  - Exact number and names of the tenants who will be renting.
  - Allow inspection of the hot water tanks and furnace every two months.



Landlords and property managers need to be aware of the activities taking place on their premises. The police recommend the following monitoring activities for rented units:

- Let your neighbors know your property is being rented, and how to contact you if needed.
- Record the make, model, year and license plate numbers of all tenant vehicles.
- Make sure your tenant knows you do regular internal and external inspections. Inform them verbally and in their lease agreement. Assure them you will give proper notice, as required by law.
- Require your tenant to carry insurance. Make sure you are a named party to prevent cancellation.
- Do not accept cash for rent. Insist on checks whenever possible. It is recommended that you personally pick up the monthly rent check instead of accepting post-dated checks.

## REPORTING A POTENTIAL GROW HOUSE



**1-800-458-TIPS**

## Report Grow Operations

You may be eligible for up to

**\$1,000 Reward**

Report Suspicious Activity to Crime Stoppers  
Remain Anonymous

In partnership with Crime Stoppers,  
Realtors Association of the Palm Beaches,  
Palm Beach County Sherriff's Office and the  
Palm Beach County Substance Awareness Coalition

If you suspect a grow house, call Crime Stoppers of Palm Beach County.

- Do not investigate the house, and/or the residents yourself. Let the authorities do that.



PALM BEACH COUNTY  
SUBSTANCE AWARENESS COALITION

## ABOUT PALM BEACH COUNTY SUBSTANCE AWARENESS COALITION

### ***Vision***

An influential substance awareness coalition valued as “the” leader for creating a drug free Palm Beach County.

### ***Mission***

“Uniting Palm Beach County by strengthening children, families and neighborhoods in their resolve to reduce and prevent alcohol and drug use, creating a drug free community”.

Palm Beach County Substance Awareness Coalition (PBCSAC) serves the entire community of Palm Beach County. The County covers 1,971 square miles and is bordered by 47 miles of beaches to the east and the second largest freshwater lake in America, Lake Okeechobee, on the west. With a total population of approximately 1.3 million, it is listed as the 29th most populous in the U.S. It includes 38 municipalities and 14 hospitals. The County is a culturally and economically diverse community. The population is approximately 79% Caucasian, 17% Hispanic or Latino, and 16% Black or African American.

One of PBCSAC’s major focuses is the protection of our youth from the disease of addiction. With the School District of Palm Beach County ranking as the 12th largest in the country, serving 174,000 students, meeting the needs of this mass is a challenge we are ready and willing to take on with your help.

### ***Board Members***

Jan Cairnes, Director of Prevention, *Hanley Center*

John Fowler, CEO, *Drug Abuse Treatment Center*

Sharon Greene, Health Promotion and Education Program Director for the Florida Department of Health, Palm Beach County

Richard Jenkins, Chief of Police, *Village of North Palm Beach*

Jeff Lindskoog, Captain, *Palm Beach County Sheriff*

Pat McNamara, President, *Community Partnership Group*

Michael Rodriguez, Executive Director, *Criminal Justice Commission*

Erik Vagenius, Director of Faith Based Ministry, *Diocese of Palm Beach County*

Kim Williams, Assistant Director of Student Intervention Services, *Palm Beach County School District*

