



Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department.

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News Release

Eradication Season Ends with Record Numbers **Sheriff's Narcotics Bureau seizes crops worth \$720-mil**

Santa Barbara—The Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department has completed a record year for marijuana eradication in Santa Barbara County.

The Sheriff's Narcotics Bureau discovered 22 illegal grow sites in 2009, an increase of more than 25% from the 16 marijuana gardens discovered the year before. The larger number of grows resulted in the eradication of more than 238,335 marijuana plants. "That's an increase of more than 350% from just one year ago," said Lt. Sonny LeGault. "Not only does it confirm how widespread this problem has become in our beautiful backcountry, it also shows the Sheriff's Department is committed to eliminating the grows that we find."

Thus far, the Sheriff's Department has seen a slight decrease in indoor marijuana gardens in 2009, with the seizure of 1,954 plants (\$5,862,000) compared to 2,517 plants in 2008. The total combined indoor and outdoor plant count for 2009 is 240,219 with an estimated street value of \$720,867,000. "240,000 plants averages out to about half a plant for every resident in Santa Barbara County," said Commander Laz Salinas who oversees the Department's special investigations. "This is not for medicinal use; this is purely for profit which can come at a very high price in terms of the public's safety."

Over the past several years, the majority of the outdoor marijuana gardens have been linked to Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations and the ensuing challenges they create. For example, in 2007 the SBSO investigated a murder that stemmed from two Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations that were fighting over growing territory. Another probable homicide occurred this year in a marijuana garden in the hills of Santa Barbara. Detectives are still investigating this incident which has led to search warrants in five counties, the seizure of several hundred pounds of marijuana, over a kilo of cocaine and the arrest of 17 suspects believed part of a Mexican Drug Trafficking Organization. These investigations have taxed the Sheriff's Department resources both physically and financially.

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The eradication of outdoor marijuana grows has also revealed the negative impact these illegal gardens have on the environment. The illegal dumping of trash, pesticides and poisons pollutes the water supply and the damming and re-routing of natural streams and creeks prohibit the natural vegetation from flourishing. Earlier this year, the cause and origin of the 90,000 acre La Brea Fire was determined to be a faulty propane tank in a marijuana garden.

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department received assistance this past year from Department of Justice, Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), National Guard, US Coast Guard and the Santa Barbara County Search and Rescue.

Large-scale marijuana cultivation is a serious and increasingly widespread problem on public lands in California, including Los Padres National Forest in Santa Barbara County. These illegal operations threaten the safety of our residents and visitors to the National Forest as well as harming the environment. Individuals involved in the cultivation, harvest and production of marijuana and other illegal narcotics can be extremely dangerous. Growers are often armed and marijuana fields are often booby-trapped.

If you come across a suspected marijuana garden or individuals involved in marijuana cultivation, leave the area immediately. Note your location and contact your local law enforcement agency or the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department at 805-681-4100 or the Sheriff's Anonymous Tipline at 805-681-4171 or the Sheriff's website at sbsheriff.org.

Marijuana Eradication Statistics Santa Barbara County

	<u>2009</u>	<u>Street Value</u>	<u>2008</u>
Outdoor grows	22		16
Eradicated plants	238,335	\$715 mil	67,556
Indoor grow plants	<u>1,954</u>	<u>\$ 5.8 mil</u>	<u>2,517</u>
Combined	240,219	\$720.8 mil	70,073

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