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Contact: [Paul Levikow](#)
(619) 531-3536

DA, DEA, US Attorney, IRS, Sheriff, SDPD Serve Warrants at Illegal Marijuana Dispensaries

Number of Dispensaries Increasing along with Citizen Complaints

San Diego County District Attorney [Bonnie M. Dumanis](#), along with United States Attorney Karen Hewitt, DEA's San Diego Field Office Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge William Sherman, IRS San Diego Field Office Special Agent-in-Charge Tami Steine, San Diego Sheriff William Gore, San Diego Police Chief William Lansdowne, San Diego Narcotics Task Force, San Marcos Mayor Jim Desmond and Vista City Attorney Darrold Pieper announced today that 14 search warrants were served at 14 marijuana dispensaries and six associated residences in San Diego, the North County and South Bay.

The warrants are a result of a four-month undercover investigation and effectively shut down the businesses which were operating under the guise of selling marijuana and marijuana-laced products for medicinal purposes.

"Like most San Diegans, I support the use of legitimate and legal medical marijuana use. However, it appears these so-called 'marijuana dispensaries' are nothing more than for-profit storefront drug dealing operations run by drug dealers hiding behind the state's medical marijuana law," said DA Dumanis.

For-profit marijuana dispensaries are not legal according to state law and the State Attorney General's published guidelines. The AG's guidelines on medical marijuana allow non-profit collectives and cooperatives that cultivate marijuana to serve their legitimate patients if they follow rules, which include acquiring marijuana only from their members and reimbursing only reasonable costs like out-of-pocket expenses. The law does not allow a patient's "primary caregiver" to be a "dispensary" but rather requires that it be someone who consistently assumes responsibility for the housing, health, or safety of that patient. The California Attorney General's guidelines on legal medical marijuana use can be found at www.ag.ca.gov.

"We have not, and will not prosecute people who are legitimately and legally using medical marijuana. It's a shame that a few illegal drug dealers are trampling on the compassion shown by voters in passing California's medical marijuana law," said DA Dumanis.

Dozens of marijuana dispensaries are operating in the county of San Diego; the number in some neighborhoods has increased noticeably in recent months. In the North County cities of Vista and San Marcos, government officials have been fielding citizen complaints about the storefronts.

Residents living near some of the storefronts have complained to law enforcement and local government about an increase in crimes associated with the dispensaries—including robberies and vandalism. During the investigation, law enforcement observed some the dispensaries guarded by armed individuals and a series of security doors. Other citizen complaints cited concerns over the proximity of the dispensaries to schools and areas frequented by children.

As a result of the search warrants, law enforcement seized marijuana at each location, more than \$70,000 in cash and six guns. An initial review of the records at one dispensary reveals that more than \$700,000 in income was generated in the past six months through the selling of marijuana and marijuana-laced products. Search warrants were served at 14 dispensaries and six associated residences in the city of San Diego, San Marcos, Vista, and Imperial Beach.

So far, 23 people have been arrested during the sweep. More arrests are possible and the investigation is ongoing. Possible charges include the sale and possession for sale of marijuana, conspiracy and firearms offenses. Those charges carry a maximum of penalty of up to four years in prison.

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