News

Grow operations take root in rural areas

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Rural grow-ops are becoming more common place and RCMP are reminding urban area residents to report any suspicious or criminal activity taking place in their neighbourhoods.

A wind gust along Grand Oro Road last week, as police continued their search of an expansive property used as a grow operation, left a waft of pungent marijuana odour hanging in the air. It is just one example in the past few months of the rural grow operations RCMP have busted.

The grow-op, near Twin Lakes, is where RCMP seized 4,860 marijuana plants. This comes on the heels of the much-publicized outdoor grow-op near Christina Lake where the owners allegedly used black bears to guard plots containing between 1,100 and 1,200 plants.

"We are seeing these rural properties where these grow operations are setting up. They tend to think in favour of the rural setup. They think it permits them a little bit more cover, but eventually in our investigations, in particular with the assistance of the communities around where they see suspicious activity and report to the local police services, we are getting pretty good success," said Cpl. Dan Moskaluk.

Keremeos RCMP dismantled a grow-op on Highway 3A north of Olalla on Wednesday.



RCMP photo

Cpl. Dan Moskaluk. holds up an assault rifle that was seized during a raid last week at a home near Twin Lakes.

Police credit the Lower Similkameen Indian Band and band members for finding the outdoor grow operation that consisted of about 150 marijuana plants.

The two men arrested at the grow operation near Twin Lakes have been released to appear in court at a later date to face possible drug-related charges. While the first male gave himself up at one of the three houses on the expansive property, a second man fled from another house into a wooded area.

Officers found an automatic assault rifle with ammunition sitting by a couch where the first male was arrested and decided to proceed with caution and shut the operation down when darkness set in, knowing that one suspect could still be in the area and possibly armed. Police believe they found the man who fled the next day, hiding in a closet in the same house the first man was arrested.

"Time and time again when we come to conduct these search warrants on these grow operations these individuals, criminals, are arming themselves for two purposes. The main purpose is to protect themselves against grow rips, but when our officers encounter automatic weapons of this nature with ammunition at its side, of course it increases the safety risk to our members and to the community at large," said Moskaluk.

He added that in rural areas throughout the Okanagan, Kootenays and in the Cariboo police are seeing properties being used for the illegal activity. Just last weekend, tips from the public to Revelstoke RCMP resulted in the dismantling of two outdoor marijuana grow operations on Gorge Creek Forest Service Road near Malakwa. Officers were flown by helicopter to a remote location where 866 mature plants were seized along with a shotgun. The second operation was located south of Revelstoke and 233 plants were seized.

Several things are attributed to the success RCMP have had, said Moskaluk, including being focused on interrupting production points, dismantling the grow-ops and stopping the transit of illegal substances.

"Time and time again RCMP traffic services come across contraband being moved, smuggled, imported and exported on the highways. Our traffic services units are highly trained investigators that know how to complex investigations, and that is why you have seen the success we have had over the past couple of years," said Moskaluk.



