



# Corporate Report

NO: R159

COUNCIL DATE: June 20, 2005

## REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council                      DATE: June 16, 2005

FROM: City Manager                      FILE: 0360-20  
Fire Chief

SUBJECT: Eliminating Residential Marijuana Grow Operations –  
An Alternate Approach

## 1.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- That Council receive the report entitled “Eliminating Residential Marijuana Grow Operations – An Alternate Approach”.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

The Electrical and Fire Safety Inspection Initiative grew out of discussions in mid-2004 between Surrey Fire Chief Len Garis and Dr. Darryl Plecas about research that revealed the significant public safety hazards associated with marijuana grow operations – in particular, fires and electrocution. The data revealed that residential grow operations are 24 times more likely to catch fire than regular homes.

The discussion about a possible alternative approach to address these hazards evolved to include a variety of organizations and government agencies, including the Fire Chiefs' Association of British Columbia, the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, RCMP “E” Division, BC Hydro, Ministry of Solicitor General, Office of the Fire Commissioner, Ministry of Attorney General and the British Columbia Safety Authority.

The City of Surrey spearheaded these discussions and hosted a 90-day demonstration project from March 15 to June 3, the results of which are documented in the report *Eliminating Residential Marijuana Grow Operations – An Alternate Approach*. Surrey's role also included creating a comprehensive operational plan for the project, with 49 guidelines to address inspection team safety, operations, training, inter- and intra-agency issues and administration.

During the demonstration project, an Electrical and Fire Safety Inspection (EFSI) team (made up of two police officers, a firefighter and an electrical inspector) followed up on backlogged police grow-operation tips and conducted electrical inspections at sites with unusually high electricity consumption that were suspected grow operations. At locations with electrical hazards, or where an inspection was refused, the electricity was shut off until repairs were made and approved by the city's electrical inspectors. In all, the team dealt with 126 sites and took action at 119 sites, by either terminating power until repairs were made (78), issuing seven-day repair notices to repair deficiencies (11), or identifying electricity bypasses used to steal power and referring them to police or BC Hydro (30).

The pilot period demonstrated success in removing the electrical and fire safety threat at grow operations in residential areas in an efficient and cost-effective manner. As expected, it also revealed opportunities to improve the project's effectiveness. For example, new policies and bylaws would assist in identifying more grow operations, mitigating other hazards found during the inspections and recouping costs associated with the program.

### **3.0 INTENT**

To inform Council of the report *Eliminating Residential Marijuana Grow Operations – An Alternate Approach* and to further develop and enhance the Electrical and Fire Safety Initiative by addressing issues such as cost-recovery, site identification and the presence of other public safety hazards at the sites.

### **4.0 DISCUSSION**

The multi-agency development of the Electrical and Fire Safety Inspection (EFSI) Initiative is a strategy to deal with the proliferation of marijuana grow operations and the many public safety hazards associated with them.

The success of the EFSI demonstration project shows it to be an efficient and cost-effective tool in the fight against grow operations in B.C., and a valuable complement to the existing criminal justice system. Based on results of the demonstration project and projections, the direct and indirect benefits of the EFSI project include:

- Reducing the significant electrical and fire safety hazards associated with grow operations in residential areas.
- Reducing the backlog of grow operation tips to police.
- Dealing with a large number of low-level grow operations or weaker cases, allowing the criminal justice system (police and the courts) to focus on the crime networks behind the marijuana trade.
- Serving as a deterrent for the residential marijuana production by interrupting operations and causing an operational hurdle for growers. (Widespread application of the EFSI program is hoped to drive grow operations out of residential areas.)
- Raising public awareness about the dangers associated with grow operations.

At the same time, the EFSI project as it stands now contains a significant amount of untapped potential. Surrey's groundwork both prior to and during the EFSI demonstration project has undoubtedly created a solid and credible foundation for the initiative. To fully capitalize on these initial successes, however, it is now critical for Surrey to continue with its leadership role and proceed with further enhancements.

### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

The City of Surrey has taken a leadership role in the Electrical and Fire Safety Inspection Initiative, from its initiation through to the completion of the demonstration project. The long-term success of the project relies on a continuing effort to extend its scope and thereby enhance its effectiveness.

To maintain the momentum achieved to date, it is important that Surrey immediately move forward with improvements that will further increase the EFSI project's ability to reduce the public safety threats associated with marijuana grow operations.

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City Manager



Len Garis

## Fire Chief

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