

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2007

# Gangland slaying rocks Shaughnessy

10-year-old calls 911 to say her dad was shot **NEWS A3**

NORTH OKANAGAN: Mounties investigating five murders and two disappearances



**Vernon hit by spate of drug killings**

INSIDE CRIME INC. HOW ORGANIZED CRIME HAS INFILTRATED OUR COMMUNITIES

## Police fear gang war over pot

Price drop expected to ignite violence between crime groups



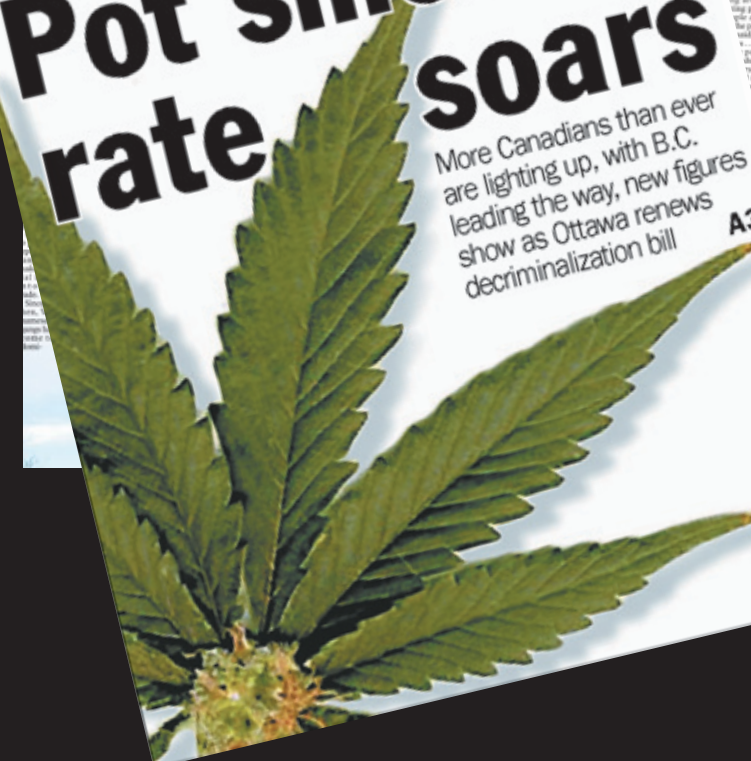
**Raging turf wars over drug loot leave cops struggling to keep up**

GUN CARRY: 'They do business together. The next day, they're enemies.'



# Pot smoking rate soars

More Canadians than ever are lighting up, with B.C. leading the way, new figures show as Ottawa renews decriminalization bill **A3**



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2007

# Gangland slayings linked to drug crews

**SURREY:** Four of six victims belonged to one of at least 30 low-level crews on the Lower Mainland, police source says **NEWS A3**



# BREAKING the SILENCE

Cannabis prohibition, organized crime and gang violence in BC

A report by STOP the VIOLENCE BC

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To learn more about the Coalition or to join, please visit [www.stoptheviolencebc.org](http://www.stoptheviolencebc.org)





# **BREAKING the SILENCE**

Cannabis prohibition, organized crime and gang violence  
in British Columbia

**Report prepared by the Stop the Violence BC Coalition**

October 2011



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## Oilers get even with Canucks

Edmonton beats Vancouver 2-1 on home ice after losing by the same score a day earlier

**SPORTS A61-63**



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**SECTION C**

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# The Province

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2006 |

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

## POLICE WARNING

# BRACE FOR GANG WAR

**TURF BATTLE:** Police warn there will be shootings, as a gang called the Independent Soldiers battles with rivals, including the UN Gang and the Hells Angels, for a share of B.C.'s lucrative drug trade

**NEWS A3**

Rolling Stones' show is a gas! gas! gas!  
make A Bigger Bang than ever in Seattle, and Vancouver  
they play here Nov. 3 **E-TODAY B4**



## INTRODUCTION

British Columbia has long been a key centre of illegal cannabis cultivation in Canada. While historically this activity was believed to be dominated by “hippies” growing cannabis in remote outdoor locations, the last two decades have seen the trade progressively characterized by high tech indoor grow operations that are increasingly under the control of organized crime groups.<sup>1</sup> The scale and impact of this market should not be underestimated. A recent Fraser Institute report, which concluded that the cannabis trade should be legalized to address the harms of cannabis prohibition, estimated that the value of BC’s illegal cannabis market was worth up to \$7 billion.<sup>2</sup>

In response, significant law enforcement resources have been used in an attempt to suppress cannabis’s contribution to organized crime in BC.<sup>3,4</sup> However, as was observed with the emergence of a violent illegal market under alcohol prohibition in the United States in 1920s, the vast illegal market that has emerged under cannabis prohibition has for many years proven resistant to law enforcement’s efforts, while unintended consequences have similarly emerged.<sup>5</sup>

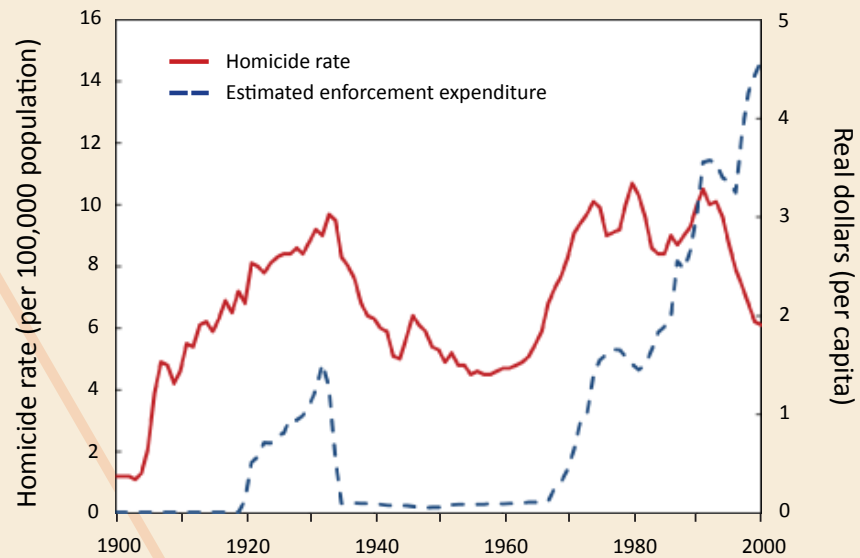
Specifically, in the wake of fears following the emergence of widespread cannabis use in the 1970s, there has been a longstanding and very costly effort to reduce cannabis availability and use through drug law enforcement. Despite more than an estimated \$1 trillion having been spent on the “war on drugs” in North America during the last 40 years, cannabis is as readily available today as at any time in our history.<sup>6,7</sup> Rates of use

are up over the last decade, cannabis potency has increased and price has decreased.<sup>8,9</sup> In fact, by virtually every metric, cannabis prohibition has clearly failed to achieve its stated objectives.<sup>10</sup> This policy failure alone is reason enough to urgently explore alternatives, but cannabis prohibition has been more than simply ineffective. Despite these serious concerns, the ineffectiveness and unintended consequences of anti-cannabis laws are rarely publicly discussed by policy makers.

In fact, while business, social and political leaders may speak privately about the concerning role that cannabis prohibition has played in fuelling organized crime and related violence in British Columbia, the province’s leaders have largely been silent on this issue in public. Worse, other leaders have been outspoken in supporting an endless cycle of new drug law enforcement interventions, without any mention of the fact that the cannabis prohibition laws themselves set the stage for the enrichment of organized crime and related violence.<sup>11,12</sup> This status quo must end.

This brief report outlines the links between cannabis prohibition in BC and the growth of organized crime and related violence in the province, and is the first report of a coalition of concerned citizens and experts known as Stop the Violence BC. The report also defines the public health concept known as “regulation” and thereby seeks to set the stage for a much needed public conversation and action by BC politicians where historically there has been a leadership vacuum.

**Figure 1.** Homicide rate and estimated expenditure for enforcement of alcohol and drug prohibition in the United States, 1900–2000



Sources: *Vital Statistics of the United States* (US Census Bureau, 1975), *Statistical Abstracts of the United States* (US Census Bureau, various issues), Eckberg (1995), and *Annual Budget of the United States*, as described in Miron (1999)



## CANNABIS PROHIBITION, ORGANIZED CRIME AND VIOLENCE

The cannabis trade in BC is unique. While cannabis is grown locally in substantial quantities, heroin and cocaine are not grown or produced locally and must be imported. This means profit margins are considerably higher for cannabis. Similarly, unlike the thriving market for domestic cannabis sales that exists in the province, which is estimated to involve well over 430,000 cannabis users, the number of British Columbians who use heroin or cocaine is only a fraction of the size.<sup>13</sup> This explains why cannabis prohibition has made such a key financial contribution to the growth of organized crime in this province and why Stop The Violence BC is focusing its efforts on the illegal cannabis trade.

The well-intentioned effort to reduce the availability of cannabis by making it illegal, like alcohol prohibition before it, has resulted in a range of unintended consequences that have been well described in the scientific literature. Most importantly, throughout North America, organized crime has been the primary beneficiary of the unregulated market, with adverse consequences.<sup>14, 15</sup> A recent systematic review of

every peer-reviewed English language study to examine the impact of drug law enforcement on violence demonstrated the clear link between drug prohibition and violence.<sup>16</sup> In fact, of all studies that have used real-world data to examine the link between drug law enforcement and violence, no study has shown a beneficial impact of drug law enforcement on reducing drug market violence. A now famous study conducted by Harvard economist Jeffrey Miron demonstrated the close correlation between drug war funding and rates of homicide during both alcohol prohibition and since Richard Nixon declared America's "war on drugs" 40 years ago **(Figure 1)**.<sup>17</sup>

Internationally, Mexico today is the starkest example of how crackdowns on drug cartels have failed to suppress the drug market and reduce violence. The horrible drug-war-related violence in that nation, which was unleashed by President Felipe Calderón after a crackdown on drug cartels in 2006, has seen more than 34,000 drug-war-related deaths since that time.<sup>18</sup>

Locally, as in most other regions in North America, BC has seen cannabis prohibition contribute to a well characterized enrichment and entrenchment of powerful organized crime groups whose modes of control are increasingly characterized by violent turf wars over the sizable profits created by cannabis prohibition.<sup>19</sup> Although the violent nature of these drug gangs was well recognized by the public as early as 1998, when a notorious Vancouver-based organized crime leader was murdered at a nightclub in downtown Vancouver, gang violence has only increased since this time.<sup>20, 21</sup> **Figure 2** illustrates the steadily increasing rate of homicide in BC attributed to drug gangs. As shown here, while 25 gang-related homicides were reported in 1997, this number increased steadily to 43 in 2009. It is noteworthy that the proportion of all homicides in BC attributable to gangs also increased from 21% in 1997 to 34% in 2009. Among the most high profile and violent episodes recently was the “drug war” between Lower Mainland gangs which resulted in more than 20 murders and 40 wounded by the end of the first quarter of 2009.<sup>21</sup> However, to Vancouverites, this high profile episode was only one collection of a series of all too common experiences in the city. Although more recent data are not easily available, gang violence has not abated since that time. For instance, on December 12, 2010, ten people were shot in a gang shooting on Oak Street.<sup>22</sup>

Importantly, these statistics underestimate the overall levels of violence, which in many cases do not result in homicide. For instance, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), “there were 276 incidents of drive-by shootings in 2009, many without regard for public safety.”<sup>19</sup> The RCMP further describes this violence in BC as “including homicides, contract killings, kidnappings, vicious ordered assaults, extortion and arson [which] continues to be the hallmark of all levels of the drug economy.”<sup>19</sup>

Along with violence that is increasingly becoming part of life in Vancouver, the RCMP have also cautioned that drug gangs are expanding their violent networks across BC. The RCMP have stated: “The expansion of organized crime groups/gangs to more rural areas of the province is expected to continue, because drug turf takeovers have been, on the whole, remarkably successful and there appear to have been only several rather short-lived clashes with the resident group(s).”<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 2.** Gang-related homicides in British Columbia, 1997–2009



Source: RCMP Statistical Overview of Homicides in British Columbia, 2009 Update



# Police fear gang war over pot

## Price drop expected to ignite violence between crime groups

BY CHAD SKELTON VANCOUVER SUN

Police fear a recent drop in the price of marijuana in B.C. could lead to increased gang violence as rival organized crime groups battle for control of the province's \$6-billion pot trade.

Inspector Paul Nadeau of the RCMP's Coordinated Marijuana Enforcement Team said B.C.'s rapidly expanding marijuana trade has been relatively stable for the past several years, with rival gangs sharing the trade's immense profits.

But recent police intelligence indicates the wholesale price of marijuana has dropped dramatically in recent months, from its peak of \$2,000 to \$2,500 a pound to as low as \$1,500.

And with fewer profits to go around, Nadeau said, police are tracing themselves for a turf war. "If they make less money next year, they'll be trying very hard to bring it back to where they were. And they're going to have to eliminate some competition to do so some things take place that are turf wars starting to surface. We may see some violence. That's quite likely."

There is also concern that violence could hurt innocent bystanders.

Several innocent people in the Lower Mainland have already fallen victim to mistaken "grow rips" in which criminals attempting to steal marijuana plants hit the wrong address.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, police say, the province's marijuana trade was dominated by outlaw motorcycle gangs like the Hells Angels and a smaller number of independent, "mom-and-pop" operations.

But in the mid-1990s, according to police intelligence reports, Vietnamese gangs began to make substantial inroads into the trade.

Since then, Vietnamese gangs have come to dominate the province's pot trade, especially in the Lower Mainland.

That dominance was highlighted in a recent study by the University of Fraser Valley that looked at all marijuana police files in the province from 1997 to 2000.

In 1997, five per cent of marijuana growing suspects identified in Vancouver were of Vietnamese origin, the study found.

By 2000, they made up 87 per cent of all suspects. The trend was the same, if less dramatic, for the province as a whole — with the percentage of Vietnamese suspects rising from two per cent to 39 per cent over nearly 20-fold increase.

And, according to police, Vietnamese gangs have only further consolidated their hold on the Surrey RCMP drug section, said Sgt. Gord Friesen, head of the about 90 per cent of the suspects arrested for marijuana growing in his city now are Vietnamese.

Even when they don't make an arrest, police can usually tell which crime group a grow operation belongs to just by looking at used — Hells Angels prefer a hydroponic water bath system and Asian gangs grow pot in soil.

Police say Vietnamese gangs have become increasingly sophisticated and systematic in establishing growing operations.

Often in concert with corrupt real estate agents, the gangs purchase or lease houses that meet their specific needs — ideally with a chimney, for venting out fumes, and unfinished basements to make wiring up the operation easier.

Then, dedicated crews — usually including a professional electrician — go out and set up the growing operation.

"You'll see an electrician come in with a number of individuals they will work day and night as quickly as they possibly can to get it up and running," said Friesen.

The gangs then typically recruit recent immigrants to tend the plants in exchange for living in the house rent-free.

A separate team of harvesters then comes every few months to take the plants.

Friesen said police believe dozens of separate Vietnamese gangs each control a network of



Police at the scene of the shooting death of a Vietnamese gang leader. Vietnamese gangs now dominate B.C.'s marijuana trade.

between six and 25 growing operations.

"They're highly organized and structured," he said. According to an RCMP intelligence report produced two years ago, police had some concerns that the rapid takeover of the pot trade by Vietnamese gangs could lead to conflicts with biker gangs.

"There were, as expected, some violent clashes, but so far the two organizations appear to have opted for respective tolerance," states the report, completed in November 2002.

But it warned that there was no way of knowing "how long this tacit peace agreement will last."

Nadeau said it appears motorcycle gangs have largely ceded the job of growing marijuana to the Vietnamese gangs, instead taking on a greater role as brokers — buying and selling marijuana in large quantities, or trading it for cocaine.

"You have different groups acquiring a level of expertise in certain areas and they work together to get the product to consumers," he said.

But Nadeau said it's unlikely that cooperation will continue if the drop in price means there are fewer profits to share.

"There's not enough money to go that starts to change, and the market certain groups undoubtedly steal the share that's presently controlled by other groups," Nadeau said the recent drop in pot prices is due to a number of

factors. The first is that increased security at the U.S. border since Sept. 11, 2001, it more difficult to smuggle marijuana south — meaning B.C. has been flooded for B.C. "bud" — Ontario and Quebec — are increasingly producing their own hydroponic marijuana.

In the past, Nadeau said, B.C. marijuana in Canada. Now, while other provinces, its share has dropped to about 40 per cent.

"My personal belief is that over time we may see more marijuana grown in the east than here, simply because the market in the east is much larger than here," he said.

Nadeau said B.C. bud has also lost its competitive advantage. B.C. marijuana has a reputation for being more potent than that grown elsewhere.

But Nadeau said hydroponic pot, no matter where it's grown, is essentially all the same.

And Nadeau said pot growers from other provinces and states aren't shy about passing off their product as B.C. bud — even if it's not.

"It's got a good reputation, so they're just using the same terminology and you really can't tell," he said.

Police have estimated the value of B.C.'s marijuana industry at about \$6 billion a year — making it the province's most lucrative crop.

Nadeau said the marijuana export trade has become the number-one money-maker for

organized crime groups, who use profits from the trade to finance other ventures, such as the importation of cocaine and guns.

"It's becoming more and more apparent that every organized crime group is looking to grow ops to generate money that supports other criminal activity," said Nadeau. "It's become their monkey machine."

Det. Jim Fisher, a Vancouver police department expert on Asian gangs, said even Chinese gangs such as the Big Circle Boys, which traditionally focused on importing heroin into B.C., are getting involved in pot.

"The profit is as good as heroin," said Fisher. "I don't think people understand how big it is. It's changed the dynamic of organized crime here."

One recent intelligence report estimated that a typical marijuana-growing operation offers a 55-per-cent return on investment in age time it takes for plants to mature.

Fisher said B.C. marijuana has three grades — Single A, Double A and Triple A — with the latter used for the export market.

He said police have seized B.C. bud from as far away as San Antonio, Tex. — where marijuana labelled as North-eastern Lights was being

touted as B.C.-grown marijuana. Nadeau said while police in B.C. bust about 1,500 growing operations a year, they have had less success in identifying the biggest players in the pot trade.

"Police are running around kicking in doors, seizing plants and arresting the people at the scene, who may not be the people who are controlling the industry," he said. "We want to change the focus... [to] the big picture and the people who are controlling the industry."

But Friesen, who oversees a seven-member dedicated marijuana "Green Team" in Surrey, said it is difficult to strike a balance between longer-term investigations that may catch bigger players and responding to residents' demands to shut down the operation in their neighbourhood.

"We're trying to take off the individuals who are responsible for many grows, but at the same time we have an obligation to our community to root out the more everyday complaint," he said.

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SUN file from Neal Hall



An RCMP helicopter pilot walks through a marijuana-growing operation near Fanny Bay on Vancouver Island. B.C.'s pot trade is estimated at \$6 billion a year — the province's most lucrative crop.

# Pot thieves bring terror in the night

BY CHAD SKELTON VANCOUVER SUN

When Eric Chow heard something banging against his front door around 2:30 a.m. Aug. 22, he thought at first it was just the wind.

Chow, 22, was watching the upstairs

"I thought they were going to shoot me," recalled Chow. "I put my back to the door so he couldn't come in."

As one of the assailants pushed against the bathroom door trying to get in, the other

After the two men had done a bit more searching, they realized there was no marijuana to be found.

And that's when

been the victims of mistaken grow rips.

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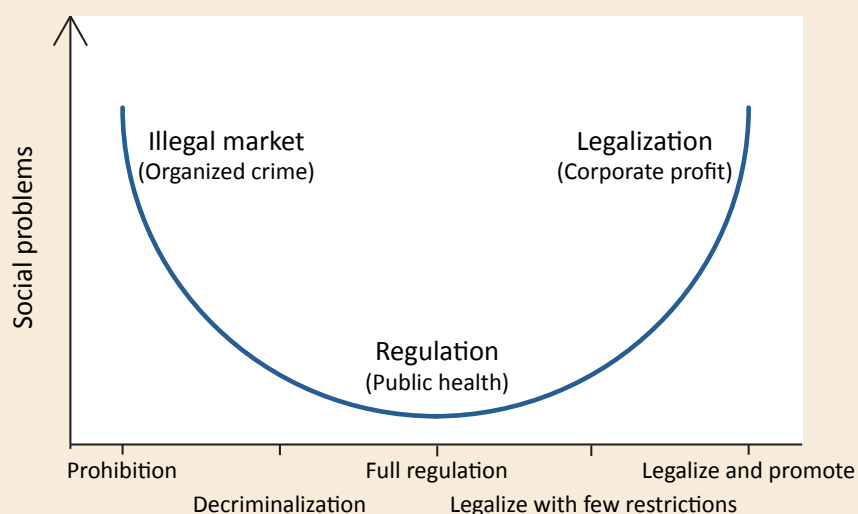


## REGULATION VERSUS LEGALIZATION

Already, the public is way ahead of BC's political leaders in the area of cannabis law reform, with a recent Angus Reid poll showing that almost two-thirds of British Columbians support outright cannabis legalization as a strategy to reduce gang violence.<sup>23</sup> Stop The Violence BC, along with several leading medical and public health bodies, including the Health Officers' Council of BC and the Canadian Public Health Association, support the notion of "regulation" of cannabis rather than outright legalization (Figure 3).<sup>24</sup> A regulated market for cannabis specifically refers to a legal market for adult recreational cannabis use, with strict regulatory controls placed upon it. While these tools have been

described in detail previously, these controls could include prohibitions on advertisement and public promotion as well as age restrictions and restrictions on where cannabis could be used.<sup>10, 25, 26</sup> These regulatory tools have proven effective at reducing rates of alcohol and tobacco use in various settings internationally and are described briefly in Tables 1 and 2. Significantly, unlike the unregulated market that currently exists, which funnels hundreds of millions of dollars directly to organized crime groups, taxation allows for proceeds from the cannabis market to be used for programs that benefit society.

**Figure 3.** Harms of prohibition, legalization and regulation of cannabis



*Adapted from Marks J, "The paradox of prohibition," in Brewer C (ed.), Treatment options in addiction: medical management of alcohol and opiate use. London: Gaskell; 1993.*

**Table 1: Potential benefits of a regulated market for cannabis**

<b>Availability</b>	Regulatory tools can be used in an effort to control access, particularly through the use of age and place restrictions. <sup>25</sup>
<b>Drug market violence</b>	By eliminating the illegal cannabis market, violence arising from conflict among those involved in cannabis supply will likely be reduced. <sup>33</sup>
<b>Organized crime</b>	Removing the illegal market will eliminate a key source of revenue for organized crime groups. <sup>34</sup>
<b>Law enforcement resources</b>	A regulated market for cannabis creates opportunities for enforcement resources to be redeployed towards improving and maintaining community health and safety. Estimates suggest that national regulation of cannabis in the United States would result in savings of \$44.1 billion per year on enforcement expenditures alone. <sup>35</sup>
<b>Tax revenue</b>	Regulating cannabis could create new sources of revenue for governments. The potential new revenue for the state of California is estimated to be between approximately \$990 million and \$1.4 billion annually. <sup>36</sup>

**Table 2: Models and mechanisms for reducing cannabis harms in a regulated market**

<b>Prescription or permit system</b>	Prescriptions or permits could be issued to individual purchasers, similar to systems in place at some medical cannabis dispensaries. <sup>25</sup>
<b>Licensing system</b>	Cannabis dispensaries could be issued conditional licences requiring compliance with regulatory guidelines. <sup>25, 26</sup>
<b>Purchasing controls</b>	Taxation (i.e., increasing consumer price barriers) has been shown to affect levels of alcohol and tobacco use and could be applicable to cannabis. <sup>25, 37-41</sup>
<b>Sales restrictions</b>	Implementing age restrictions, similar to tobacco and alcohol regulations, could limit access to cannabis among youth. <sup>26, 37</sup>
	Limiting days and hours of sale of alcohol has been shown to affect levels of alcohol use and could affect rates of cannabis use. <sup>25, 38, 41</sup>
	Alcohol outlet density has been associated with rates of alcohol use and hence limiting cannabis outlet density could limit rates of use. <sup>38, 41</sup>
	Restrictions on bulk sales as employed in the Netherlands, where purchases are restricted to 5 grams, could help restrict diversion to minors. <sup>25, 26</sup>
<b>Restrictions on use</b>	Regulatory policies that affect the location or circumstances of use and allow for limited use in designated places, such as the Dutch coffee shop model for cannabis, could limit uncontrolled and “public nuisance” use. <sup>25, 26</sup>
	Strict regulations would prohibit driving or operating machinery while impaired. <sup>26, 41</sup>
<b>Marketing</b>	Strict regulations on marketing and product branding would reduce exposure to advertising, which is known to affect rates of alcohol and tobacco use. <sup>26, 42</sup>
<b>Packaging</b>	Tamper-proof packaging, standard labelling on content, factual health warnings, and no on-pack branding or marketing would help regulate cannabis use. <sup>26</sup>
<b>Reducing harm</b>	Regulated and controlled availability of lesser-strength substances reduces the illegal market for and use of higher potency substances, as has occurred with the regulation of alcohol. <sup>25</sup>
	Opportunities should be explored to change patterns of use towards non-smoked cannabis. <sup>43, 44</sup>

## BENEFITS

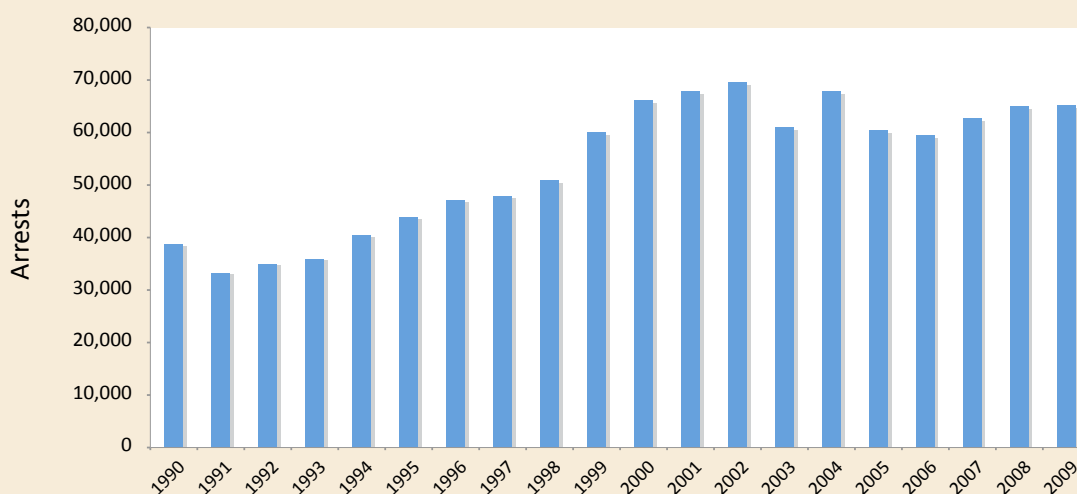
Rates of cannabis-related arrests in Canada have risen from approximately 39,000 in 1990 to 65,000 in 2009 (Figure 4). The costs to the law enforcement and judicial systems, as well as the costs of incarceration, are a heavy and growing burden on the taxpayer. Regulation has the potential not only to eliminate the violent illegal cannabis market and raise tax revenue but also to end the excessive cannabis law enforcement expenditures that drain tax dollars. Instead of enforcing a cannabis prohibition system that unwittingly contributes to organized crime and violence, law enforcement resources could be successfully redeployed where they can actually improve community safety.

Furthermore, while the growth of property-damaging indoor cannabis “grow-ops” in BC is commonly used to justify the increased deployment of law enforcement resources, the reality is that these opportunities are created

by cannabis prohibition itself.<sup>27</sup> In fact, many reasons given to support cannabis prohibition—such as the growth of organized crime—are actually reasons to consider alternatives rather than to invest further tax dollars into futile anti-cannabis law enforcement efforts. As economists have repeatedly pointed out, any successful intervention to reduce the number of cannabis producers only makes it more profitable for others to enter into the production market, and the violent cycle continues.<sup>17</sup> In addition, regulation could create a system of cannabis production that would noticeably reduce the occurrence of home invasions, property damage, hydroelectricity theft, house fires and environmental concerns which have emerged under the existing system of anti-cannabis law enforcement.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, under the status quo of cannabis prohibition, no effective regulatory controls are in place to successfully limit cannabis sale to minors.

**Figure 4.** Cannabis-related arrests in Canada, 1990–2009



Source: Statistics Canada

Instead, under the unregulated illegal market that is controlled by organized crime, profit motivates organized crime groups to expand their market, which helps explain why youth currently have such free and easy access to cannabis.<sup>6</sup> Under a strictly controlled legal framework, regulatory tools could be employed in an effort to make cannabis and other drugs less available to young people. In the Netherlands, to take one example, where cannabis is sold in licensed “coffee shops,” a key rationale for cannabis regulation was to separate cannabis sales from the sales of other harmful drugs.<sup>28</sup> The idea was that drug dealers might offer heroin, cocaine and other addictive drugs to young people who may initially be interested only in cannabis experimentation. A regulated market in BC could similarly achieve this goal.

While the actual impact of cannabis regulation on rates of youth drug use will likely depend on the models of regulation and the cultural changes they bring about, results elsewhere have been positive. For instance, comparisons between the United States and the Netherlands, where cannabis is de facto legalized, indicate that despite the US’s record levels of drug enforcement expenditures, the lifetime rate of cannabis use in the US is more than double that observed in the Netherlands.<sup>29</sup> In this context, it is arguable that cannabis prohibition itself contributes to, among other things, the glamour of cannabis use among youth.

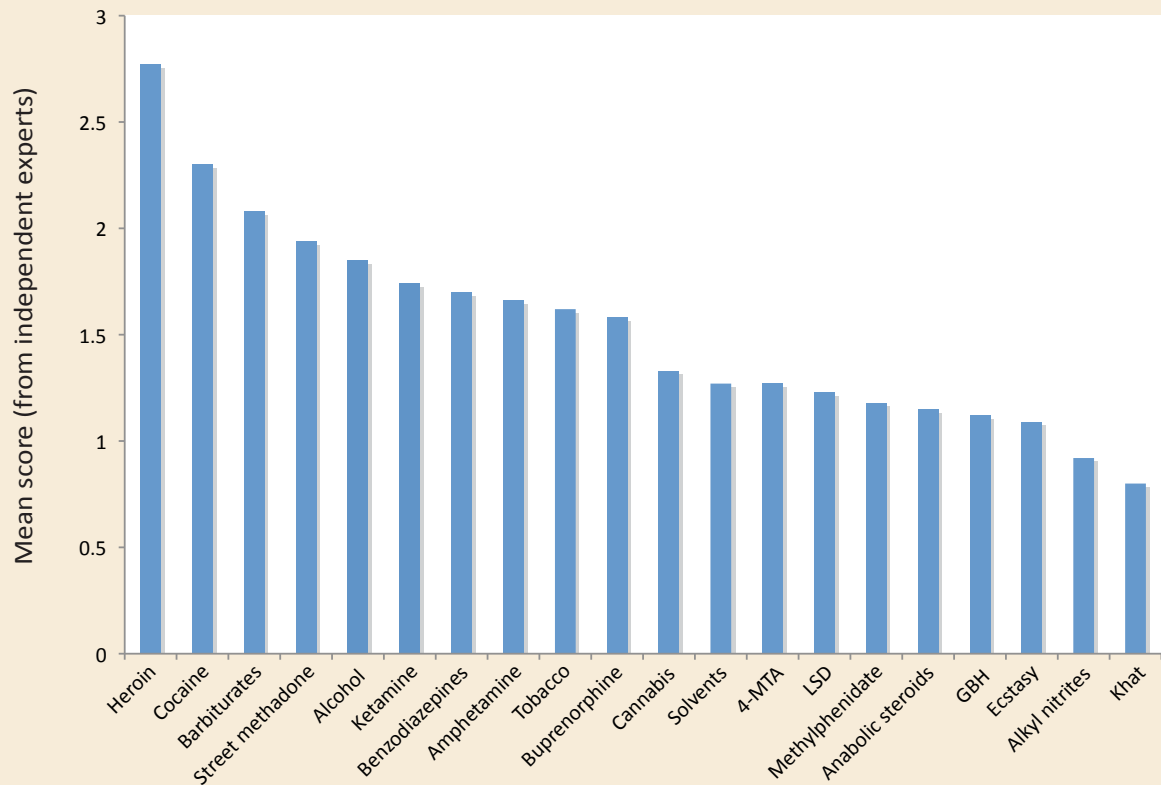


## HEALTH EFFECTS

In recent years, scientific reviews have concluded that, while cannabis is not without health-related harms, these harms are viewed to be less serious than those associated with alcohol and tobacco (Figure 5).<sup>30</sup> The potential health issues for cannabis consumers, as well as social issues such as the public safety implications of driving after using cannabis, have been reviewed elsewhere.<sup>26, 30</sup> While the authors of this report view these issues

as critically important and further rationale for an impact assessment of cannabis prohibition, they have focused in this report on the organized crime and violence implications of cannabis prohibition. Future reports by Stop The Violence BC will seek to address a number of these health and social challenges and solutions to BC's cannabis problem.

**Figure 5.** Mean harm scores for 20 substances



*Adapted from Nutt D, King LA, Saulsbury W, Blakemore C. Development of a rational scale to assess the harm of drugs of potential misuse. Lancet. 2007 Mar 24; 369(9566): 1047-53. Review. Used with permission.*



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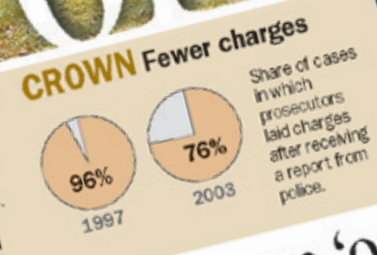
## B.C.'S FAILING WAR AGAINST MARIJUANA GROW-OPS

A VANCOUVER SUN SPECIAL REPORT

With more than 4,500 reports last year of illegal indoor pot-growing operations, B.C. police cannot



# Out of control



**A COMMON STORY**

August 2002: Family home at 2158 Burcorm Dr., Vancouver (above) closed by drug squad after illegal marijuana-growing operation found. Power, gas cut.

November 2001: Re-occupancy permitted.

January 2005: Police again find grow-op. Services cut. City includes now "Warning to Prospective Purchasers" policy to warn others if house is offered for sale.

## Criminal justice system 'on the brink of imploding'

BY CHAD SKELTON  
VANCOUVER SUN

Police are less likely to investigate marijuana growers, prosecutors are less likely to lay charges against them, and judges are less likely to send them to jail than they were in the late 1990s, according to a groundbreaking study to be released today.

"It seems, no question about it, that the system is increasingly unable or otherwise failing to respond to this problem, despite the fact that we have every indication that the problem is worsening," said Darryl Plecas, a criminology professor at the University College of the Fraser Valley, and the study's lead author.

"I think we have a criminal justice system that is very much on the brink of imploding."

The study of the province's pot trade is based on a review of all reported cases of marijuana growing in B.C. from 1997 to 2003. "We went to every single police office and physically pulled the files ourselves," said Plecas.

Researchers then tracked the results of each case through the justice system. The \$250,000 study was paid for by the RCMP, but Plecas said he was given carte blanche to draw his own conclusions — which in many cases were not very flattering to the police.

"People in the system perhaps would rather this report not be there, because it's not exactly complimentary of any part of the system," he said.

One of the report's key findings is that the percentage of growing operations reported to police that are "fully investigated" — meaning, in most cases, a search warrant being executed — has dropped from nearly all cases (91 per cent) in 1997 to just over half (52 per cent) in 2003.

See POLICE LESS A5

## U.S. official: Canadian pot no soft drug

BY TOM BLACKWELL

WASHINGTON — The number of American teenagers and adults who are ending up in emergency wards of marijuana

high-test Canadian pot, the White House drug czar said Thursday.

John Walters estimated the industry is also funneling "billions" of dollars into the pockets of organized crime north of the border and said Canadian prosecutors tell him they need laws to combat the

growing-operations bonanza. "It has grown dramatically," he said of the northern pot trade.

"The question that is always on our side of the border, and on theirs, when these problems arise is: 'How many more people will suffer until we are able to change the trend line?'"

The elevated THC content — which is the active ingredient in pot — of Canadian marijuana means it can no longer be considered a soft drug, argued Walters, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

See 120,000 POT A2

**INSIDE**

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Cloudy, sunny breaks

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## CONCLUSION

From an evidence-based perspective, cannabis prohibition has clearly failed to achieve its stated objectives and has resulted in a range of harms, not the least of which is the growth of organized crime in British Columbia and the all too common violence that has been linked to the cannabis trade.

Many misconceptions exist regarding the actual impacts of cannabis prohibition, and

special interests contribute to public confusion by commonly making false or misleading statements about the alternatives to the status quo.<sup>31, 32</sup> This report therefore concludes with a questions and answers section addressing many of the common questions about cannabis prohibition and its alternatives.

## BEER for PROSPERITY CAMPAIGN

1914



# How Crime Is Financed

Millions of dollars made from  
bootleg Beer now finances all  
kinds of crimes, kidnappings, etc.

1932



## Legalizing Beer would bring to the U.S. Government \$2,000,000,000 New Revenue in Four Years

if a tax of \$3 a half-barrel were levied. With this tax the total price per half-barrel would be \$6.75, as against today's bootleg price of \$18, and you'd get good wholesome Beer, the Government would be able to reduce taxes, thousands of men would find work and good times would return.

In 1914 consumption of malt liquors amounted to 2,056,407,108 gallons, or 20.54 gallons per capita.

In 1932, consumption (same per capita basis) would exceed 2,567,500,000 gallons. At \$3 tax per half-barrel the annual revenue to the Government would be over \$495,000,000.

In 1914 there were 1,413 breweries. In 1930, 231. If Beer were legalized, upwards of \$500,000,000 will be spent remodeling plants, buying trucks, etc., and upwards of 250,000 jobs created for unemployed men.

● **The Only Place Where Beer Can Be Legalized Is In Congress. Now Is the Time, When All Congressmen Are Up for Election, to Select the Candidates who Favor Beer.**

**DO IT BEFORE ELECTION... AFTERWARD IT'S TOO LATE**



## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**1 If we regulate cannabis, won't organized crime move into another more dangerous criminal activity?**

There is no evidence to suggest that cannabis prohibition protects British Columbians from crime and violence by somehow preventing criminals from engaging in other activities. Organized crime has gravitated to the cannabis trade because of the huge profits and the ease with which this trade evades law enforcement. Rather than protecting British Columbians, cannabis prohibition is a key revenue stream for organized crime which allows gangsters to finance other illegal activities. For

instance, the RCMP have noted how BC cannabis is taken to the US and traded for cocaine that is subsequently sold in Canada. Eliminating the substantial revenue stream provided to organized crime through cannabis prohibition will deter people from getting involved in the illegal cannabis trade in the first place and will make those who choose to remain in organized crime less able to finance other activities, forcing them into activities that are less profitable and more visible to police.

**2 Why not just decriminalize cannabis?**

In several places around the globe, cannabis possession and use for personal purposes has been decriminalized. For instance, in the State of California, individuals caught in possession of up to one ounce of cannabis only receive a minor administrative infraction—the equivalent of a parking ticket. While this saves law enforcement resources, it still leaves an unregulated market

to the benefit of organized crime. As a result, violence continues, no tax revenue is generated, and no effective regulatory controls are put in place to limit harms such as cannabis sale to minors. Rather, the only interest of the illegal market is profit, hence the easy availability of cannabis to young people under cannabis prohibition.

**3** **Isn't cannabis more potent than it was in the 1970s?**

Yes. Under the existing system of cannabis prohibition, cannabis has become many times more potent than it once was. The increasing potency and decreasing price of cannabis are further evidence of the failure of prohibition, and the increasing potency of cannabis is an important reason to evaluate a regulatory framework. In particular, links between highly potent

cannabis and psychosis among young people have been reported, and these reports provide all the more reason to protect young people by regulating this market in the same way we place limits on the strength of alcohol or the nicotine content of cigarettes.

**4** **Why not pursue more aggressive forms of anti-cannabis law enforcement?**

The laws of supply and demand succinctly explain why cannabis prohibition has failed and will continue to fail. For all commodities for which there is demand, including cannabis, any successful effort to reduce supply will have the perverse effect of increasing the value of the remaining supply. This is why any “successful” anti-cannabis law enforcement effort that reduces supply (such as a major drug bust) has the perverse effect

of incentivizing new players to begin cannabis production. This explains why drug arrests are often followed by turf wars and more violence. In the United States, where aggressive law enforcement under the war on drugs has resulted in more individuals behind bars than in any nation in the world, mass incarceration schemes have not reduced the cannabis market or related harms (e.g., violence from drug gangs).

### Shouldn't we be focusing our energy on cannabis prevention?

Preventing cannabis use is a key priority for Stop The Violence BC. Great strides have been made with tobacco prevention through regulatory tools that can be applied in the context of a legal market. Unfortunately, prevention efforts that have been evaluated to date have not been effective for cannabis use, and the profit motive of organized crime cripples prevention efforts. Anti-drug media campaigns, which are

commonly employed in North America in an attempt to convince youth to avoid experimenting with cannabis, have proven ineffective through scientific evaluation. Regulation of cannabis is not inconsistent with prevention and, in fact, an effective regulation system that focuses on public health has the potential to reduce rates of use and other harms.



Photo courtesy of Hagley Museum & Library.

### Will regulation result in increased cannabis use?

Various studies, including a recent global review by the World Health Organization, demonstrate that rates of cannabis use are largely unrelated to national drug policies. As indicated above, comparisons between the US and the Netherlands, where cannabis is de facto legalized, indicate that despite the US's record levels of drug enforcement expenditures, the lifetime rate of cannabis use in the US is more than double that observed in the Netherlands. In this context, it is arguable that cannabis prohibition itself contributes to, among other things, the glamour of cannabis use among rebellious youth. Similar evidence comes from Portugal, which decriminalized all drug use in 2001 and where rates of cannabis use remain among

the lowest in the European Union. Hence, the argument that regulation will increase rates of use and other harms (e.g., driving while intoxicated) is not supported by existing evidence.

The actual impact of cannabis regulation on rates of use will likely depend on the models of regulation and the cultural changes they bring about. For instance, Switzerland's implementation of a regulated heroin market through a medicalized prescription program was associated with a marked decline in heroin use attributed to increased negative attitudes towards heroin among Swiss youth. Taking the glamour out of the illegal cannabis market is a key objective of Stop The Violence BC.



### Will cannabis regulation in BC hurt US relations and trade?

Cannabis policy in the US is reforming at a faster pace than in Canada. On July 1, 2011, Connecticut became the 14th American state to decriminalize personal use of cannabis. As noted above, in California, possession of up to one ounce of cannabis is only a minor infraction similar to a traffic violation. Furthermore, in 2010, a ballot initiative aiming to “Tax and Regulate” cannabis in the State of California was narrowly defeated and, to date, there are six states with similar initiatives underway for the 2012 election. In addition, Democrats and Republicans recently joined together to table a bi-partisan bill in Congress that would allow states to legalize, regulate, tax and control marijuana without federal intervention.

While this most recent bill may not pass, with public opinion shifting in the US, polls suggest cannabis regulation will become a reality in some US states in 2012.

Regardless, Canada is a sovereign nation and, like Mexico to the south, is experiencing gang warfare and other harms as a direct result of cannabis prohibition and the heavy demand for cannabis in the US. Like their US counterparts who are working to address the unintended consequences of cannabis prohibition, BC politicians should demonstrate leadership in addressing these longstanding concerns by supporting evidence-based alternatives.

**Isn't cannabis law reform beyond provincial and municipal jurisdiction?**

Local and federal political leadership is urgently needed to address the unintended consequences of cannabis prohibition. While all of Canada would benefit if the federal government took an evidence-based approach to addressing the harms of cannabis prohibition, it is unlikely that this leadership void will be filled by the current government. In this context, the province's hands are not tied when it comes to reform. Given the serious

problems stemming from organized crime and violence in BC secondary to cannabis prohibition, it would be unwise of local politicians to further ignore this pressing issue by citing federal jurisdiction and thereby missing the opportunity to work towards change. Stop The Violence BC is calling on local municipal and provincial politicians to move to address these issues now.

**We already have alcohol and tobacco. Why add another drug to the problem?**

We can no longer ignore the harms of the extensive illegal cannabis market that exists alongside the legal market for alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. This illegal market has proven resistant

to law enforcement's best efforts to control it. A regulatory model, while not perfect, offers a range of advantages over the current system of cannabis prohibition.

### 10 **Isn't most cannabis in BC produced for export?**

Yes. The majority of cannabis produced in BC is exported to other parts of Canada and the US. However, the domestic market in BC is still large enough to provide hundreds of millions of dollars to organized crime groups—or to the provincial government in the form of taxation, were this market regulated. The ultimate solution to address the export market for cannabis grown in BC is regulation of cannabis in destination markets. As indicated

above, regulated market models may emerge in the US after the 2012 federal election, and we hope that the Stop The Violence BC campaign will ignite a vigorous debate in Canada. If BC is able to regulate cannabis and in so doing reduce organized crime and raise tax revenue—without producing unanticipated harms—this would set an example that ideally would lead to policy change in destination markets.

### 11 **Would regulation be evaluated?**

Yes. Any system of cannabis regulation would need to be piloted on a small scale and rigorously evaluated to measure for expected benefits (e.g., tax revenue to governments as a proxy for funding removed from organized crime) and closely monitor for any unanticipated harms, such as increased cannabis use,

drug tourism, etc. This type of scientific evaluation could inform scale-up of any regulated market model and provide insight into tools for enforcement of regulations or, alternatively, suggest that we should return to the current system of prohibition.

**If cannabis, why not heroin and cocaine?**

The tendency to portray all illegal drugs as equivalent has contributed to the failure of the war on drugs. Unique strategies to address the harms of substances should be individually tailored. Stop The Violence BC welcomes a dialogue about the unique criminal justice, public health and regulatory tools that could be employed to address the harms of each illegal drug. However, while cannabis is grown locally in substantial quantities, heroin and cocaine must be imported,

with much higher profits to be made, therefore, through the sale of cannabis. And, unlike the large domestic market for cannabis, estimated at more than 430,000 users, the market for heroin and cocaine in BC is a fraction of that size. This explains why cannabis prohibition has made such a key financial contribution to the growth of organized crime in this province and why Stop The Violence BC is focusing its efforts on the illegal cannabis trade.



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