



Organized Crime Research Brief no. 5

POP and Outdoor Cannabis

BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

As with indoor grow operations, particular resources and circumstances are required for growing cannabis outdoors. Understanding offending patterns can lead to novel suppression and disruption strategies.

Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) is an approach to developing strategies for countering persistent crime problems and draws from a broad range of approaches to inform a focused course of action. One common mnemonic that captures the essential components of POP is SARA, which stands for: Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment.

The purpose of this report was to outline how the principles of POP might be applied to disrupting and preventing the operation of outdoor marijuana grow operations (OMGOs) controlled by organized crime groups within Canada. An interesting observation is that a greater attention to environmental conditions can assist in operational planning because of the peculiar seasonal and climatic limitations on the outdoor cultivation of marijuana, including the need for proximity to electrical and transportation infrastructure. The authors also proposed a framework and implementation plan that a POP approach to OMGOs might follow, including which partners might be most usefully engaged in such an endeavour.

When optimally applied, POP has a significant impact on persistent problems across a range of criminal issues. An example of this kind of success for indoor marijuana grow operations is the effectiveness of targeting the power supply to these types of criminal operations. OMGOs controlled by organized crime groups within Canada represents a large-scale problem that has proven to be highly resistant to traditional policing approaches. It is reasonable to expect that the effective implementation of novel POP strategies for combating these problems should have a positive impact.

The POP approach to combating OMGO issues has a number of strengths and weaknesses. First, scanning and assessment of the OMGO problem in Canada is facilitated by jurisdictions sharing a common *Criminal Code of Canada*, but limited by the fairly broad meaning of the term OMGOs. Second, as is the case in other jurisdictions, uncertainty surrounds the size of the OMGO problem in Canada. Third, eradication and seizure of crops are currently the main response to OMGOs in Canada; however, there is no framework for assessing the effectiveness of this response to OMGOs in Canada.

One major evaluation study, by Mazarolle, et al. (2005), studied drug law enforcement initiatives undertaken around the world and found that proactive, partnership-focused interventions (involving police and third-parties or community entities) are the most effective mechanisms for reducing persistent crime problems, and would therefore seem to support more widespread implementation of POP-based strategies. Overall, the authors of the present report assessed the quality of drug law enforcement research as poor and the evaluation of counter-drug initiatives as lacking rigour.

This report indicates that the application of a problem-oriented policing approach to the problem of OMGO may prove effective. It is apparent that policing can have an important role to play in developing strategic responses to combat this type of offending, by reducing the opportunity for offending, in addition to uncovering and building cases against perpetrators of these types of crimes.

A POP framework could potentially make a positive contribution to efforts designed to combat OMGOs in Canada, conditional on maintaining realistic expectations about the likely short-term impact of any strategy emerging from such work.

Furthermore, if pursued, the authors caution that this approach must be used in an iterative manner to deal with a crime problem that will evolve over time in response to effective crime prevention initiatives.

Clare, Joseph, Paul Brantingham, and Patricia Brantingham. *Problem-Oriented Policing Approaches to Outdoor Cannabis Growing*. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety Canada.

Mazerolle, Lorraine, David Soole and Sacha Rombouts. (2005). *Drug Law Enforcement: The Evidence*. Drug Policy Modelling Project Monograph Series. Brisbane, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, Inc.

For more information on organized crime research at Public Safety Canada, please contact the Organized Crime Research Unit at ocr-rcu@ps-sp.gc.ca.

Organized Crime Research Briefs are produced for Public Safety Canada and the National Coordinating Committee on Organized Crime (NCC). The NCC and its Regional/Provincial Coordinating Committees work at different levels towards a common purpose: creating a link between law enforcement agencies and public policy makers to combat organized crime. *Organized Crime Research Briefs* supports NCC research objectives by highlighting evidence-based information relevant for the consideration of policy-development or operations. The summary herein reflect interpretations of the report authors' findings and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Public Safety Canada or the National Coordinating Committee on Organized Crime.