



## WHITE PAPER

October 6, 2022

TO: FIRESCOPE Board of Directors  
23300 Castle Street  
Riverside, CA 92518-2200

FROM: FIRESCOPE Ops Team, Task Force, & Incident Safety Subcommittee

**SUBJECT: FIRESCOPE Marijuana Cultivation Awareness White Paper**

REQUEST: Board Approval of this White Paper to allow wide distribution its recommended actions.

*APPROVAL: The Board of Directors approved the recommended actions outlined within this document on October 6, 2022.*

### **SUMMARY**

Due to numerous recent incidents throughout California, the FIRESCOPE Board of Directors has directed the Task Force to develop a presentation and white paper to address operational safety hazards found in and around marijuana cultivation operations. According to the FIRESCOPE charter, this issue falls under the responsibility of the Incident Safety Subcommittee. In March of 2022 Task Force directed the Incident Safety Subcommittee to develop the aforementioned products.

The incidents that brought the hazards and associated risks to light include the illegal grow operation in Aguanga, Riverside County in September 2020 and the Lava Fire illegal grow operations in Siskiyou County in June 2021.

The changing times in society have resulted in the alteration of the roles and responsibilities of California Emergency Responders. Emergency responders are presented with dynamic situations and must provide an "All Hazard" response to incidents involving marijuana cultivation.

Some departments may not be properly equipped, staffed, or trained to mitigate such incidents; Initial response personnel need to maintain a high level of situational awareness and possess the essential skills necessary for incident stabilization. Emergency responder safety is the highest priority. It is important to identify the hazards and risks associated with marijuana grow operations and needs of responders in order to safely mitigate these incidents.



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Incidents involving marijuana cultivation may include the rescue or recovery of victims, providing emergency medical assistance, fire suppression, and crime scenes that will require close coordination with law enforcement. It may be necessary to coordinate with federal, state, and local agencies. Technical specialists may also be necessary. Pre-incident training and preparedness drills should be conducted to build a close partnership with assisting and cooperating agencies. Effective unified command and interoperability include good communication and strong working relationships with all agencies. Incidents involving marijuana cultivation may include human-made hazards, crime scene preservation, unified command, perimeter integrity and control, incident within an incident, dynamic long-term events, and significant logistical demands.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The FIRESCOPE Incident Safety Subcommittee (ISS) makes the following recommendations:

- Include the FIRESCOPE ISS Marijuana Response White Paper Guidelines and PowerPoint to the annual RT-130 curriculum
- Post the FIRESCOPE ISS Marijuana Response White Paper Guidelines and PowerPoint on the FIRESCOPE website

### **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

Implementation of the recommendations should be incorporated into the annual RT-130 wildland refresher training.

Incident management organizations should be made aware of the recommendations as soon as possible.

California Wildland Coordinating Group should be made aware of the recommendations as soon as possible.

### **CONCLUSION**

The FIRESCOPE Incident Safety Subcommittee is committed to improving all aspects of firefighter safety. The dissemination of the FIRESCOPE Marijuana Response Guidelines throughout the fire service will enhance training and operational safety for all firefighters. The guidelines will provide consistent operating principles to agencies and Incident Commanders. The guidelines will also help to secure positive outcomes for incidents involving marijuana growing operations in most environments.

An important step in preparing for an incident involving marijuana cultivation includes the development of an emergency response plan. The plan should include a thorough and clear set of Standard Operational Guidelines/Policies/Procedures for this type of incident. It is also important for agencies and Incident Commanders to develop



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strong relationships with all stakeholders.

### **FIRESCOPE MARIJUANA RESPONSE GUIDELINES**

#### **Initial Dispatch and Response for Incidents Involving Marijuana Cultivation:**

- An incident may appear relatively safe upon arrival, yet can change quickly
- Initial and continuous size-ups are essential
- Implement operational objectives, considering the hazards
- Notify the Incident Commander immediately
- Notify Law Enforcement immediately
- Ensure appropriate Personal Protective Equipment and safety considerations are implemented
- Maintain Lookout, Communications, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones (LCES) at all times
- Many grow operators monitor radio frequencies. Minimize radio traffic. Encourage cell phone use and/or face-to-face conversation
- Perform decontamination when necessary
- Hazardous Materials response shall be considered

#### **Safety Measures:**

- **Do not touch anything in the cultivation area**
- **Do not turn on/off any electrical power or light switches**
- **Do not eat or drink in or around a cultivation area**
- **Do not open or remove any containers**
- **Wash your hands and face thoroughly**
- **Consider decontamination procedures**

#### **Potential Hazards of Incidents Involving Marijuana Cultivation**

- Hidden, concealed, or improvised traps/devices
- Explosion/fire
- Violent occupants
- Weapons on site
- Aggressive animals
- Unsafe structures
- Electrical system tampering and substandard wiring
- Oxygen deficient/hazardous atmospheres
- Hazardous materials



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### **Warning Signs of Potential Grow House/Cultivation Sites**

- Unusual Smell/Odor
- Condensation on windows
- Excessive air conditioning units
- Unusually large electrical service and/or modified electrical wiring
- Unusual waste products, e.g. fertilizer containers, soil amendments, and drums
- Electrical generators or fans in continuous operation
- Indoor high voltage lights or excessive lighting
- Cameras, high fences, locked gates, heavy chains, boarded/covered windows, or unusually high security
- Illegal building additions

### **Warning Signs of Marijuana Cultivations in Wildland Areas**

- Marking and/or camouflaging of trails
- Buried, disguised, or water lines in unusual locations
- Chicken wire or field fence in unusual places
- Animal poison
- Campsites with PVC, fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, gardening tools, and drip tubing
- Suspicious individuals
- No trespassing signs placed on public land

### **Considerations and Notifications**

When personnel encounter cultivation sites during non-emergency situations, the following procedures should be considered.

- STOP, take careful note of your surroundings
- Move slowly and cautiously exit the area the same way you entered
- Mark the location on a map or record GPS location
- Note descriptions of vehicles or people in the area

When personnel encounter cultivation sites during emergency situations, the following notifications should be considered

- Law Enforcement: Federal, State, and Local
- Hazardous Material Response Team
- Building Department and Structural Engineers
- Environmental Health Department
- Medical Transport
- Fish and Wildlife
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Terrorism Liaison Officer (TLO)

**\*Board of Directors Approved: October 6, 2022**



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# ILLCIT MARIJUANA GROWS IN THE WILDLAND ENVIRONMENT

IMMEDIATELY LEAVE THE AREA  
DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CONTACT/DETAIN ANY PERSONS WORKING AT THE LOCATION

### INDICATIONS OF MARIJUANA GROWS

- Obvious signs: strong odor of burnt or unburnt marijuana and/or marijuana plants present
- Unnatural trails in and out of an area
- Irrigation equipment
  - Tubing and pipes
  - Plastic lining (rolled or unrolled)
  - Small makeshift reservoirs
  - Pesticides
- Large amounts of trash
- Camping/cooking equipment
- Armed individuals
- Roadside drops of food and/or equipment on mountain/fire roads

### SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FOR FIREFIGHTERS

- Immediately leave the area of the marijuana grow
- Once in a safe location make notifications to the following:
  - Incident Commander
  - Safety
  - Law enforcement
  - Adjoining forces
- Do not confront and/or attempt to detain any individuals working within the marijuana grows. People working within illicit grows are known for violence against public safety officials and civilians. They are typically heavily armed and should be considered extremely dangerous.

### HAZARDS OF MARIJUANA GROWS

- HazMat conditions due to pesticides
- Persons armed with weapons
- Makeshift weaponized traps
  - Holes in ground
  - Bear traps
  - Tensioned branch spikes
- Guard dogs