

'Killer dope' may become reality says NORML; blames U.S. govt.

By KEVIN HACKETT
Of the Emerald

Decades ago in its publicity battles against marijuana consumption, the United States government labeled the herb "killer dope—the assassin of youth."

While that campaign failed to convince a large segment of the population that smoking pot was deadly, the government may now be guilty of making killer dope a reality by helping poison 10 percent of the marijuana that crosses the Mexican border into the United States.

The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) has charged the U.S. government of endangering the health of its citizens by assisting Mexican authorities in spraying herbicides on marijuana and poppy fields.

The spraying program, which was outlined in documents obtained from various federal agencies by NORML, through the Freedom of Information Act, has been underway since late 1975.

NORML says the documents reveal the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has supplied Mexican authorities directly with equipment and manpower, and indirectly with chemicals to spray marijuana and poppy fields with paraquat, a herbicide used mainly for cleaning seed beds before planting crops and weed control in fruit orchards; and the herbicide 2,4-D.

A statement issued by the White House's Office of Drug Abuse Policy in December lends credence to NORML's charge that some marijuana imported into this country from Mexico may be contaminated with the highly toxic herbicides.

The statement said the National

Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) analyzed samples of marijuana confiscated by the DEA in its Southwest Region. NIDA tested 45 samples averaging 900 pounds each. They found six of the samples contaminated with paraquat.

The report said there is concern that plants sprayed with paraquat are being harvested before the herbicide can kill the plant. NIDA has studied the effects the contaminated pot would have on individual if it were ingested and found that a person would have to consume one pound of marijuana in a matter of few hours for it to be fatal.

However, NIDA has only recently begun research into the effect the smoke of paraquat-treated marijuana might have. No report on the research has been issued yet.

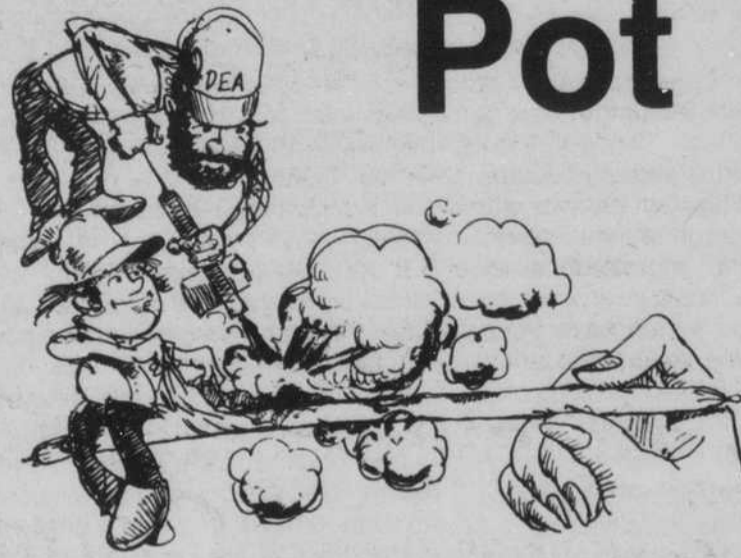
Five weeks ago, NORML sent a letter to the DEA and the state department requesting that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) concerning the spraying operation be filed. It also demanded that a moratorium be placed on all U.S. assistance with, and involvement in, the spraying program until the EIS is filed.

Peter Meyers, chief counsel for NORML, said he has had discussions with DEA and state department officials during the past month but no progress has been made.

"We've had meetings with them and they haven't been too receptive," Meyers said. "Since we're getting no action here, we're hoping to take them to court in about a week."

David Hoover, public information officer for the DEA, said the DEA has formed a special committee to study the effects of the herbicide spraying, but that "to the best of my knowledge our assistance to the Mexican gov-

Poison Pot



Drawing by Jim Payne

ernment has not been discontinued."

While the spraying program's primary purpose is to eradicate poppy fields to stem the supply of Mexican heroin flowing into the United States, marijuana fields are also being sprayed by the Mexicans with equipment provided by the DEA, he acknowledged.

Meyer said the federal government argued that it doesn't need to file an EIS on actions taken by a foreign government on its own soil.

NORML counters that the spraying program effects the United States environment as well as Mexico's. NORML estimates that 15 million Americans are regular users of marijuana.

The NORML letter cited several cases in which U.S. government-assisted pesticide spraying and construction projects in foreign countries were halted by court rulings until an EIS was filed.

A story published by the New York Daily News last November reported the federal government has ex-

tended its spraying assistance to other foreign countries known to be major producers of marijuana and other illicit substances.

It was reported that governments of Venezuela, Columbia, Burma and Jamaica have all been offered assistance, but only Venezuela accepted.

Hoover would not confirm the Daily News' allegations but did say that the DEA has been in contact with the Venezuelan government to discuss methods for stopping marijuana production in that country.

He added that a crop substitution program has been initiated with Columbia to replace coca fields with other crops to help halt the supply of cocaine available.

According to NIDA, paraquat-treated marijuana appears to be "damp, yellowish and sickly looking." Detecting affected marijuana once it hits the streets may be impossible because the marijuana has probably been manicured and in most instances has been mixed with untreated plants.

Physical Plant seeks ok on energy plan

The University Physical Plant will save about \$48,000 a year in energy costs if an energy-saving plan it has submitted to the State Board of Higher Education is approved.

Jack Hunderup, vice-chancellor for facilities planning, says a \$147,000 remodeling project

would enable the plant to use gases that normally go up the smokestack to pre-heat water before it is fed into the boiler system. The boiler would have less work to do, resulting in the energy saving.

The remodeling would also involve additional insulation of duct work.

The plan received initial approval Feb. 23 by the board's Finance Committee. Later this month it will go on to the full board and if approved there, to the Emergency Board for approval of a funding scheme to pay for the alterations.

Harold Babcock, director of the

physical plant, is confident the board will approve the plan.

Babcock says the smoke that leaves the stack at the plant is normally 450 degrees. The alterations would take 200 degrees from the stack gases and use it to pre-heat the water used in the boilers. He says this "heat recovery unit"

operates much like a car radiator.

The unit will save the physical plant 11 to 12 percent in fuel consumption. This works out to about \$48,000 a year. So the system could be paid for in three years.

Hunderup says the short pay back period is one of the primary attractions of the scheme.

Marquess Engineering of Springfield was contracted by the physical plant to recommend energy-saving steps the plant could undertake. Hunderup says other recommendations were made but the one proposed to the board is the most practical right now.

Hunderup and Babcock say that if the plan is approved, the heat recovery system should be in operation by next summer.

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