

PPEs for Illegal Marijuana Grow Sites

In November 2012, Colorado residents voted to legalize marijuana, leading to numerous legal marijuana grow operations opening throughout the state. These legal grows are regulated by and subject to state law; however, counties still encounter illegal grows that must be cleaned up and destroyed. These unregulated grows can pose health hazards to county employees tasked with their removal because unknown pesticides and animal repellents may be present on the plants, or mildew and mold may be present in poorly ventilated grow houses.

While some counties have access to hazmat teams to deal with these types of clean-ups, others rely on county employees, such as those on road and bridge crews, to clean up illegal grows. County employees tasked with cleaning up an illegal grow should use proper personal protection equipment (PPE) to protect them from exposure to unknown chemicals, hazardous mold, and mildew spores. All employees coming into contact with illegal grows should use proper PPE equipment. Should a county employee, especially a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) holder, be tasked with clearing an illegal grow, any accidental contamination should be documented.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD ASSESSMENT

An environmental hazard assessment should be made before clearing an illegal grow to determine what kinds of PPE are required. Recommended PPE and the potential hazards to consider are listed below:

- Eye protection – to protect against liquid chemical splashes or aerosolized dust.
- Hand and skin protection – to protect against chemical exposure, skin irritation, cuts, and abrasions. Nitrile gloves are recommended by the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE). Clothing that covers the arms and legs, such as coveralls, may also be warranted.
- Hearing protection – to protect against prolonged exposure to high noise levels such as that generated by industrial equipment. This can include earplugs or earmuffs.
- Respiratory protection – to protect against dust, pollen, airborne chemicals, mold/mildew spores. Depending on the risk, a single-strap dust mask may be useful; however, depending on the hazard assessment, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recommends a NIOSH-certified respirator (e.g., N95). See www.osha.gov/Publications/3352-APF-respirators.pdf for guidance on respirator selection.

TRAINING

According to the CDPHE, employers are required to train each employee to whom they provide PPE to conduct their work activities. The following information must be included in this training:

- What PPE is required.
- When to use PPE.
- How to properly use the assigned PPE, including how to put on, take off, and adjust it.
- The PPE's limitations.
- How to properly care for, maintain, clean, and dispose of the PPE.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COUNTIES

Illegal marijuana grows continue to be a problem, and Colorado counties should ensure that employees cleaning up these grows wear proper PPE. For more information, contact CTSI at 303 861 0507.