

Operation Scorpion Phase 5 - 'Spotting the Signs'

The latest phase of Operation Scorpion, our regional drugs operation across the South West, is taking place throughout June through to mid-July.

The focus this time is around cannabis cultivation and modern slavery, run by organised crime groups.

Any enforcement relating to cannabis often attracts criticism, but the reality is that OCGs involved in cannabis cultivation not only drive anti-social behaviour, violence, and crime within our communities, but also endanger the lives of people in neighbouring properties. Crucially, they also exploit vulnerable people who are victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.

That's why there is a national Crimestoppers campaign currently urging the public and 'professional enablers' such as builders' merchants and landlords to 'spot the signs' and know how to report suspected cannabis grows.

We're asking you to spread the information amongst your communities on what to look out for, and have provided some information and suggested social media copy and assets below.

Thank you for your support.

Cannabis grows

Would you know if there was a cannabis grow near your home? Properties used to cultivate cannabis are part of illegal drug supply and organised criminal gangs, they pose an extremely dangerous threat to communities. Not only do they fuel crime such as modern slavery and exploitation, they are also a huge fire risk.

Signs that a property may be being used to cultivate cannabis are:

- A powerful distinctive sweet, sickly aroma
- Frequent visitors throughout the day and night
- Blacked out windows
- Chinks of bright light throughout the night
- Birds gathering on the roof, particularly in cold weather
- In winter, snow melting unusually quickly on the roof
- High levels of condensation on windows
- Noise from fans
- Large amounts of rubbish, including compost bags
- Electricity meter being tampered with/altered and new cabling, sometimes leading to street lighting
- Lots of visitors
- Unusual adaptations to the building

If you spot any of this happening in your neighbourhood, report it. Together, we can stop vulnerable people becoming victims of illegal drug crime and criminal exploitation.

Report to us online or by calling 101. Alternatively, you can report anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Modern Slavery

There were almost 17,000 suspected victims of modern slavery referred to the Home Office in 2022. Many of these were involved in criminal exploitation or trafficked to the UK to work on illegal cannabis farms run by organised crime gangs.

Signs that someone is a victim of modern slavery could include:

- Being locked in or restricted from leaving a property
- Not speaking English
- Signs of physical abuse
- Lack of basic hygiene facilities
- Someone dropping off food parcels/takeaways
- Malnutrition
- CCTV monitoring around the property

Victims of modern slavery are not benefitting from the crimes they are being forced to commit. If you suspect this may be taking place, please report any information to us online or via 101, or you can make an anonymous report to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

#NoPlaceForDrugs

Cuckooing

No matter whether you use them once a month or once a day, buying illegal drugs fuels the exploitation of vulnerable people and has serious criminal consequences in our local area.

Often, criminals looking to engage in drug supply or growth will take over the home of a vulnerable person in order to use their property as a base for illegal activity. This is known as 'cuckooing'. They often target people with physical or learning difficulties, economic deprivation, drug or alcohol dependencies or isolated and lonely people.

Signs to look out for can include:

- Increased footfall to a property throughout day and night
- Anti-social behaviour around the property
- Changes in behaviour – becoming withdrawn
- Signs of grooming – having new possessions
- Signs of physical abuse or unexplained injuries

If you are concerned someone may be a victim of cuckooing – report it. You can report to us online or via 101, or you can make an anonymous report to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

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