

Community Comment

The past few months marijuana use and cultivation, both legal and illegal, has been in ^{our} the news, as it often is in Humboldt County. Some ~~articles~~ have expressed concern that the California drought will cause the price of marijuana to increase. There have been other ~~articles~~ expressing more likely and more important fears that the rising tide of marijuana grows, combined with drought, will wreak havoc on our environment. Do the marijuana growers still labor under the delusion they are bringing in ^{on} ~~an~~ Age of Aquarius: ~~some sort of~~ peace and enlightenment through cultivating Humboldt Gold? ^{can't it?} Even if they did, would it justify them stealing clean water and filtering it through a host of dirty chemicals ~~from pesticides and fertilizers that then run~~ ^{then returning a bit into} into our streams and rivers? ^{ow} Due to our winter drought, summer water flow is likely to get extremely low in many of ~~the~~ streams and rivers ~~in our area~~. A typical marijuana plant takes 3-5 gallons of water per day and we have hundreds of grows in our county both indoors and outdoors. So, you do the math; With water poachers looking to divert ~~the~~ water in order to keep their thirsty marijuana plants alive ^{until harvest}, I expect many streams and smaller rivers could grow toxic or dry or both-- enough to kill many of the fish and other aquatic life. ~~I heard someone the other day say they are cutting down on meat because cows emit too much methane gas. I have yet to hear anyone suggest that cutting down on marijuana might be prudent because of water pollution!~~

The hue and cry over the ~~environmental~~ damage marijuana cultivation is doing to our environment is long overdue. Nevertheless, I find it ironic and amusing that all too few seem to care what marijuana does to the human brain. The government's war on drugs largely failed, because some of the earlier attacks or programs were ill informed about the real dangers of illegal drug use. Look, no one's saying that smoking one joint is going to turn you into a Balrog. But here's what the facts *are* saying.

A growing body of research has ~~come~~ ^{fig} out, demonstrating that marijuana usage damages the ~~brains of it users~~—especially in the case of chronic users and most especially in the case of young, chronic users. Maybe that does not alarm you but it does me. Sure, meth is worse and so might whiskey be worse. Marijuana has long been touted as safe because it has a very low lethality rate. In other words, it's not likely to kill you; but here is what it *can* do: ^{Andrew Penn?} "Early, heavy use of cannabis before the end of adolescence increases the risks of psychotic illness, psychiatric hospitalization, decreased IQ, and in young women, anxiety and depression (5-11)." (Andrew Penn)

Sooner or later cannabis is going to be legalized in most states including ours. As a result prices will fall and who knows what will happen to the growers in our county. ~~I have a feeling many will go out of business because they would have to work as hard as other farmers.~~ But there might also be a tendency to think that cannabis is harmless because it has been made legal. If this leads to an increased usage of marijuana by our youth, the results could be disastrous. ~~We've already got a huge water shortage, not to mention a shortage of beds in California's mental hospitals.~~ Whatever happens in Sacramento, parents, teachers, counselors and doctors need to be armed with the facts about marijuana and disseminate them widely, in hopes that our future will not go up in smoke.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment