

Office of the Governor

NEWS RELEASE

PO BOX 004
TRENTON, NJ 08625

CONTACT: Jayne O'Connor
Julie Plocinik 609-777-2600
John Hagerty (NJSP)
609 882-2000 x6516
RELEASE: August 13, 1998

Gov. Whitman Heralds State Efforts to Weed Out Marijuana Growers Announces Marijuana Hotline and Reward Program 1-888-798-WEED

Elevating the war on drugs in New Jersey, Gov. Christie Whitman today announced that Army National Guard helicopters equipped with state-of-the-art technology are high above searching for, locating, and ultimately destroying marijuana fields hidden in the rural countryside of the state.

The Governor highlighted the state's anti-drug efforts and announced a 24-hour, toll-free hotline and \$500 reward for reports of suspected marijuana growers during her visit to Trenton/Mercer County Airport in Ewing. During her visit, the Governor stressed statistics released earlier this week showing that New Jersey's crime rate has dropped to a 24-year low.

Gov. Whitman inspected two OH-58 Kiowa helicopters with infrared capability that are part of the state's Domestic Cannabis Eradication and Suppression Program. The program, which began as "Operation Green Merchant," is an effort by the New Jersey State Police Narcotics Enforcement Unit, the Army National Guard, the Air National Guard to stop the cultivation of marijuana. It uses helicopters equipped with high-tech devices to locate hidden marijuana fields.

Since 1992, the program has resulted in the arrest of 283 drug suspects, the seizure nearly 25,000 marijuana plants worth nearly \$2 million, and the confiscation of 100 illegal weapons.

"While the Garden State is world-renowned for its fine produce, marijuana is one crop that is not welcome on our soil," said the Governor.

"I can't make it any clearer: we won't tolerate drug users and sellers in New Jersey. This high-tech aerial operation we are seeing today is going to the root of the problem and helping us put even more force behind our convictions," Gov. Whitman said. "I urge citizens to use our confidential marijuana hotline to report their suspicions. We all must work together to weed out those who break the law and attempt to poison our children with illegal drugs."

"With the operation of this specialized unit, New Jersey is taking an aggressive approach to locating and ultimately destroying hidden marijuana growing fields and to arresting suspects involved in illegal activity," said Attorney General Peter Verniero. "One of New Jersey's greatest strengths in fighting drugs and crime is the unprecedented cooperation and of coordination among law enforcement agencies at all levels."

According to Colonel Carl Williams, Superintendent of the State Police, the Domestic Cannabis Eradication and Suppression Program receives nearly \$115,000 in funding through the federal Drug Enforcement Administration DEA each year. DEA Special-Agent-in-Charge Anthony J. Seneca from the DEA's Newark Office joined the Governor at the event. The New Jersey program employs specially-trained State Police detectives assigned to the Narcotics Bureau, experienced helicopter crews from the New Jersey Army and Air National Guard R.A.I.D, members of the New Jersey Civil Air Patrol, and representatives of local and county law enforcement.

The Governor announced the new **1-888-798-WEED** hotline, where citizens can call to report sightings of suspicious plants. She also announced that a reward of up to \$500 will be offered for information leading to the seizure of growing marijuana. New Jersey radio stations today will begin airing a message from Gov. Whitman publicizing the hotline and reward program. A copy of the text of that message is included in this packet.

State Police emphasized that informants calling the hotline should know the location, address, or landmarks of the suspected growing site, and should make

note of any vehicles or persons in the area. Informants should not enter a suspected area.

The Governor said the war on drugs will be further aided by Ionscan, a new drug and explosive detective device that will be used by the Department of Corrections as part of its Zero Tolerance program. The Department of Corrections has purchased two Ionscan Model 400 units, that will be utilized at both Northern and Southern State prisons. Prison staff, visitors, and inmates will be subject to testing upon entering correctional facilities. The Governor said that the Ionscan units will serve as a constant deterrent to those individuals attempting to introduce illegal substances into our facilities.

The Ionscan 400 detects and identifies illegal narcotics using Ion Mobility Spectrometry (IMS) by collecting, vaporizing and analyzing microscopic particles. The Ionscan works by collecting a sample through a swipe or vacuum collector.

"Narcotics law enforcement is at the top of our list here in New Jersey," said Gov. Whitman "We've targeted open air drug markets, outlawed 'Special K', stiffened penalties for crimes related to drug use and sales, outlawed booby traps and other devices used to injure law enforcement officers during drug busts, expanded drug-free zones and mandated drug education in our schools."

"We won't rest until we've wiped out the scourge of illegal drugs. We will continue to work around the clock to stop the flow of all illegal drugs and to make our communities safer places to live," she said.

Also at the event, Gov. Whitman presented a \$6,000 check to the Monmouth County Sheriff's Department to purchase and train a new search and patrol dog. The department's previous dog, Solo, was shot and killed during a 23-hour standoff with a robbery suspect in Bradley Beach earlier this summer. During his two years as a search and patrol dog, Solo found 16 suspected criminals and 19 missing persons.

Governor Christie Whitman Fighting the War Against Drugs

War on Drugs - Reaffirmed the war on drugs and called for a comprehensive statewide strategy to reverse the tide of substance abuse and drug-related crime in New Jersey. The Governor placed narcotics law enforcement at the cornerstone of the state's overall crime strategy. The strategy includes measures to reduce the supply of drugs by stepping up efforts to prosecute suppliers, and also to reduce the demand for drugs through education and community and parental outreach.

Open Air Drug Markets - Initiated the Drug Enforcement, Education, and Awareness Program and the Model Quality of Life Program to help eradicate open air drug markets and to discourage casual and first-time drug users by cutting off easy access to dealers.

"Special K" Outlawed - Added to the State's list of Controlled Dangerous Substances the veterinary anesthetic ketamine hydrochloride, which in humans causes hallucinogenic reactions. The use or unauthorized possession of the drug is now a third-degree crime.

Booby Traps - Outlawed use of booby traps and fortification structures commonly used to injure law enforcement officers during drug busts.

Peer Leadership Training Program - Instituted by Department of Health and Senior Services, this program trains middle school students as peer leaders who teach their peers how to resist the pressure of using drugs or alcohol.

Penalties - Increased penalties for drug offenses and crimes related to drug use or sales:

- Dealers who distribute large quantities of marijuana and methamphetamine - Increases possession and distribution of large quantities of these drugs to a first-degree crime, which brings the statutes in line with those concerning heroin and cocaine; also adds marijuana to the "Controlled Dangerous Substance Production Facility" statute.
- Upgraded penalties for the use of "rape drugs" to facilitate a sexual assault - The use of rape drugs like GHB and Rohypnol to facilitate a sexual assault is now a crime of the first degree when the defendant knew or should have known that the victim was physically or mentally incapacitated.

- Anti-Profiteering Act - Imposes additional monetary penalties on those found guilty of dealing large amounts of drugs for profit.

Drug-Free Zones - Signed legislation that designates drug-free zones and creates a new second-degree crime for distributing, dispensing, or possessing with the intent to distribute a Controlled Dangerous Substance in the zones.

Mandatory Drug Education - Mandated as part of the Core Curriculum Standards that drug education programs be conducted in schools.