



# The Professional Inspector

Information Publication for Homeowners, Realtors, Mortgage Brokers, Insurance Brokers, Professional Builders & Inspectors

## Grow-Ops A Downer For Real Estate Agents

Canada's realtors are quietly waging war on former marijuana grow-ops. While there's not much they can do to stop a grow-op from launching, realtors are banding together locally, provincially and nationally to offset the repercussions that can result when a former grow-op is resold to an unsuspecting buyer. *"The key part of it is that the house speaks for itself, so that these houses can be assessed - and need to be assessed,"* says Brian Walker, president of the Ontario Real Estate Association (OREA).

His group, which represents realtors across the province, has formed a task force to look at the issues surrounding grow-ops. Answering the question of what makes a marijuana grow-op central to dealing with sales issues. But developing a clear policy on the issue has been difficult.

*"In some ways, we're struggling with which way to cope with it, because, what is a grow-op? That's one of the big questions. Is a house a grow-op if you had 10 marijuana plants growing in the basement?"* says Walker, a broker who operates an agency based in Richmond Hill, Ont.

The Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA), provincial real estate associations and local real estate boards are also offering their members training and workshops with police and industry groups. They have introduced mandatory or voluntary disclosure requirements for sellers and are doing as much as possible to increase public awareness about the potential pitfalls of former grow-op sites.

Among other concerns, former grow-ops pose health risks, structural damage due to mould or water, or changes to the foundation as a result of growers trying to bypass electricity meters or obtain power illegally.

[Inside This Issue](#)

**Special Interest Articles**

Grow-Ops - Downer For Real Estate Agents.....	1
Best Mold & Mildew Cleaner.....	3
Squirrels In An Attic Are A Danger.....	4
Electricity Is Resistant To Rust.....	5
Industry News.....	6

All these things can ultimately reduce a property's value. CREA has developed a consumer property information statement that it distributes to its members, which includes a disclosure on whether a property was a grow-op. Some groups, including the Calgary Health Region and Winnipeg Police Service, have started publishing former grow-op addresses online. The registries list properties where police have scuttled operations and charged the occupants. CREA doesn't have a clear policy on a registry of former grow-op sites because the association is not sure what defines a grow-op.

*"Does that mean that a house that had 10 plants growing in the basement will be stigmatized?"* says Walker. "In some cases, it could have been the tenant running the grow-op.

*"Those are the cases where it's clear that the house speaks for itself. There could have been no damage arising from that activity, so it does seem unfair to stigmatize a property like that."*

Lorne Weiss, a Winnipeg realtor who serves as vice-chairman of the CREA federal affairs committee, says *"the very bold move"* by his city's police department to publish former grow-op addresses online has assisted the caveat emptor (or buyer beware) process. He says most realtors believe a seller should disclose former grow-ops, and real estate associations and boards across the country have done a good job of informing their members about the risks and implications of marketing them.

"It's not something you can easily apply the principle of caveat emptor to, because in many cases the home was cosmetically well repaired," he says.

Winnipeg realtors are ethically obligated to disclose former grow-ops, although there is no disclosure form required. If a seller instructs a realtor not to disclose, or the realtor knows a site was once a grow-op, the realtor must refuse the listing. If a seller does not inform a listing agent that a house was a grow-op, he can't be held accountable, says Weiss. Similar disclosure rules are in place across the country. Some real estate boards require disclosure forms to be signed, while others do not.

Critics of the idea of a national grow-op registry focus on the hazy definition of a grow-op.

*"If you have three plants in your house and you're arrested, your house is a grow-op,"* says Weiss.

*"That throws you into the same category as somebody who has a house or a farm property or a garden and is raising hundreds of plants.*

*"I think (Winnipeg) has a pretty good system in the sense that, if somebody is charged, their house goes on the registry. It's incumbent upon the buyer or his agent to investigate as to what the nature of the grow-op was."* He notes the industry has worked hard to raise the level of professionalism among its members and supports government efforts to increase penalties for grow-ops and identify grow-op houses.

Weiss, who has sold and visited former grow-ops, says the role of the realtor is to make sure that buyers are properly informed and have all the facts and advice to make a decision.

*"They're definitely stigmatized and (the grow-op history) has an impact on value. But there's always a buyer."*

The Calgary Real Estate Board (CREB) participates in a grow-op task force that includes fire, police and health officials, as well as banks and mortgage brokers. A majority of CREB members also take courses and workshops provided by the board and city police during the past two years.

*"Realtors are strongly encouraged to check all the properties they're selling or listing to make sure they're aware of potential problems,"* says CREB president Ron Stanners. Stanners says Calgary police are busting about 300 grow-ops per year, or almost one a day. CREB requires that realtors have sellers sign a disclosure form regarding a property's grow-op status.

Realtors who do not disclose could be held liable for damages.

Stanners, a broker who owns and operates his own agency, says some of his realtors have refused to list homes they suspected were former grow-ops, even though they weren't busted by police or listed on the Calgary Health Region's site.

*"There wasn't the same problem five or 10 years ago that there is now," says Stanners. "There's no doubt there's more today than there was back then. "The realtors have been very well educated - unless they've been well hidden - in recognizing the signs and symbols." "They're making their knowledge available to the buyers (and) I would say the public is being protected as best they can from our end of it."*

He advises buyers to instruct their agents to insert a condition in the sales contract whereby the seller warrants the property was never a grow-op or drug-manufacturing house.

Ron Esche, CREB executive vice-president and CEO, says former grow-ops that have not been busted by police can pose a health hazard.

The City of Calgary requires that a condemned former grow-op's remediated heating, electricity, plumbing and air quality be inspected and approved before it goes back on the market.

Esche praises Calgary's city council for creating new bylaws that give municipal officials more authority over the remediation process. Calgary, he says, is probably *"slightly ahead of the curve"* than other municipalities on grow-ups because it tackles the problem collectively and came up with some good recommendations.

(Monte Stewart can be reached at [monte@businessedge.ca](mailto:monte@businessedge.ca))

### **Best Mold & Mildew Cleaner**

Over the years, I receive and come across a lot of products, for that matter, we all do either through television advertising, newspapers / magazines (not so much reading though now a days), and of course the internet. While browsing the internet I came across a cleaning product that is all natural and is a mold cleaner. I'm always looking for a mold cleaning product that does not have harsh chemicals and from what I have researched, this product has none.

EcoDiscoveries is the company I came across which a product called "M2," of which is their most recent all-natural, safe mold stain and odor remover. This industrial-strength product contains only natural ingredients which are free of hazardous chemicals found in conventional mold and mildew products. Unlike some other products, M2 contains no enzymes and instead uses plant extracts that have abilities for tackling mold and mildew growth. M2 is biodegradable and safe for use around children, pets and those with chemical sensitivities.

Features of this product are non-toxic and the manufacturer states that it is

- . Biodegradable
- . Chlorine-Free
- . Petroleum-Free
- . Glycol-Free
- . Phosphate-Free
- . Acid-Free
- . Caustic-Free
- . No Animal Testing
- . Hypoallergenic
- . Fragrance-Free
- . Dye-Free

M2 appears safe for the many surfaces that I have tried it on within the home. I have sprayed and wipe clean many surfaces that have mold or mildew such as wood, concrete, stucco, vinyl, brick, drywall, decks, patios, dog houses, fabric, carpet, textiles, plastic, rubber, garden tools, tool sheds, crawl spaces, appliances, enameled surfaces, laminate, countertops, floors, stainless steel, bathroom surfaces, porcelain, natural stone, marble, granite, tile, glass, and more.

Ingredients as I read the bottle is filtered water, plant-derived surfactants, a complex of biologically active phytochemicals present in their natural state, vegetable derived glycerin & inorganic mineral salts. That's it, surprisingly simple compared with other products out there

For this product, additional information and ordering can be done online and more information is available at their website [www.ecodiscoveries.com](http://www.ecodiscoveries.com) or at [www.moldzyme.com](http://www.moldzyme.com).

(Note: PWHI does not and is not endorsing this product but is providing information only and does not and will not receive any monetary compensation in anyway or form).

### **Squirrels In An Attic Are A Danger!**

I have had squirrels in my attic before, and they were hard to get rid of. A Havahart trap from the local farm supply center worked great, along with some apple and peanut butter bait, and they were finally removed. I took them to the Manassas Battlefield Park and let them go right where Stonewall Jackson waited for the Union troops and earned his nickname. They lived happily ever after! And I still have the trap! This is why squirrels in an attic are a danger! The same thing was happening in this attic that happened in mine.



The squirrels took insulation and piled it up and into an igloo, inside of which they lived comfortably and warm. Of course, a large, energy inefficient gap is left where the insulation is missing! Fortunately, there were no baby squirrels yet, which is less of a complication when trying to eradicate them. But this is the real problem. Attic squirrels have a tendency to chew on things!

One of the worst things to chew on would be the wiring. While doing so might zap the squirrel beyond repair, it also might create a spark or heat that could cause a fire. Yes, squirrels are known to cause fires in attics!

My recommendation: if you hear squirrels above your head chewing on something, or scampering from one side of the attic to the other, do not delay in trying to get rid of them! Feel free to send them to me and I will let them go at the battlefield. All joking aside, attic squirrels are a problem you don't want to fester. And scattering a few of these around the attic will keep them busy until you are able to purchase a trap!

### **Electricity Is Resistant To Rust**

The electricity in a house comes and goes. It arrives, happily flows around the house, and is continually connected to the distribution facility nearest the house via a closed circuit. It likes to flow freely (don't we all?) and energize every spot in a house it is supposed to. Anything that interrupts or slows down that flow causes resistance, and its path is impeded. One thing that can cause resistance is rust.

Electricity is resistant to rust. Water or rust in a panel box is a warning sign. If the box or circuit breakers are rusting, unseen corrosion could be causing high-resistance electrical connections. These "poor" connections often cause excessive voltage drop that may shorten the life of motor-driven appliances like vacuums, air conditioners, washing machines, etc. And oxidation of aluminum wiring is especially dangerous. I have seen houses, where water had infested the panel box, demonstrate 40 volts on one side and 165 volts on the other as the aluminum neutral conductors in the box slowly turned to powder and did not provide proper connections.

This box showed a lot of moisture and rust on certain breakers. Inside the box had lots of stains where previous water had actually dripped and run. The source of this moisture is unknown, which may have come from the outdoors before they sealed the entry point years ago. What is observed here is not recent moisture. The washing machine breaker is rusty, at the top. And that receptacle was nearby, so it was tested it. Indicated voltage, which jumped between <100 and 105, is too low. The resistance, was well above 15%, too high. So obviously this circuit was affected.



Several other branch circuits had even lower voltage around the house. These are apparently similarly affected by this panel box rust. All in all, an electrician is needed, and perhaps a new box!

Recommendation: When the signs point in a certain direction, follow them! Sometimes they are full of information!

## **Industry News**

### **[BC Home Sales To Increase 7% In 2011, Median Price To Rise To \\$402,000](#)**

Home sales in British Columbia will rise about 7 per cent in 2011 and the median price will set a new record of \$402,000, according to the latest B.C. Housing Forecast 2011-2013, released by Central 1 Credit Union.

### **[Canada's Housing Market Update April 2011](#)**

Royal Bank of Canada reports that home resale statistics for March by the Canadian Real Estate Association confirmed that, overall, the Canadian housing market is transitioning to a more stable, sustainable path, following more than two years of significant volatility. (PDF)

### **[Is It "Go West Young Man" All Over Again?](#)**

Conference Board of Canada says the trend observed in the second half of the 2000s of a shift in growth toward Western Canada is expected to resume. It is principally attributable to four factors, which are not mutually exclusive.

### **[Half Of Younger Canadians Plan To Buy Next Year](#)**

RBC annual Homeownership Study finds over half of younger Canadians plan to buy next year, and 46 per cent of younger homeowners say mortgage costs eat up too much income.

### **[Minimum Wage Hikes Lead To Job Losses](#)**

Canadian Federation Of Independent Business report attempts to quantify the number of Canadian jobs affected by minimum wage increases. CFIB estimates that a 10 per cent increase in the minimum wage across all provinces costs between 92,300 and 321,300 jobs.

### [Don't Try These Designs At Home](#)

Builder Magazine's panel of builders and architects weigh in on trends, practices, and products to avoid.

### [Exterior Spray Foam](#)

Building Science describes why and how spray polyurethane foam (SPF), the high-density stuff, is the only product (so far) that can perform all of the functions of the principal control layers of the perfect wall including water control, air control, vapor control, and thermal control.

### [New Concrete Walkways & Sidewalks](#)

Concrete Network shows how the versatility of concrete and the many decorative techniques available for adding color and pattern provide many options for making a concrete sidewalk unique.

### [How To Keep Garage Fumes Out Of House](#)

Green Building Advisor discusses whether an exhaust-only ventilation, excellent air-sealing, and an attached garage may prove problematic for keeping garage fumes out of a house.

### [Window Reflections Can Melt Vinyl Siding](#)

Green Building Advisor says window reflections can melt vinyl siding and siding and window manufacturers are reluctant to discuss the problem.

### [New Fireplace Products & Ideas For 2011](#)

Builder Magazine describes what's smokin' hot in fireplace design for 2011, including new materials, funky shapes, and in some cases, products that produce no smoke at all.

### [Garage Floor Coatings](#)

Concrete Network describes how epoxy floor coatings can turn garage floors into an extension of a living area by adding color, hiding imperfections and improving wear resistance.

### [Tips & How-To Articles For Kitchens & Baths](#)

National Kitchen & Bath Association offers tips and how-to articles on a variety of subjects, including kitchen or bath remodels, budgeting a project, green design, and safety.

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- Chimney Inspections
- Grow-Op Inspections
- Mould Inspections
- Indoor Air Quality Investigations
- Home Renovation Consultant
- Seasonal Home Check & Maintenance
- Water Quality Testing
- Air Testing
- Radon Testing



**Serving Clients For Over 12 Years**

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At Pacific West Home Inspections, you will find the home and property information, educational and industry news that will help raise your professionalism and that of the house and property inspection industry as a whole. Dave Brice of Pacific West Home Inspections is the editor and publisher and has been involved in the home and property inspection field since 1998 and the construction industry for over 25 years. For additional information about the services Pacific West Home Inspection provide articles and E-Books that can be downloaded for no cost, go to [www.bchomeinspections.ca](http://www.bchomeinspections.ca) website.

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