

Grow Ops; A Growing Concern

Unfortunately grow ops have been in the news a lot lately, as each week seems to bring a report of another grow op bust in our neighbourhood, and of the brazen and organized criminals that earn their income from them. Typically, the losers in the grow op business are the purchaser of the home, or the owner of the home if it was rented.

A grow op is a marijuana growing operation, which can range from as small as a few plants to huge, sophisticated, well-planned farming process that use a home and residential environment as cover for the crime.

Realtors are privy to the knowledge that the home was a grow op and are able to protect clients— only if the police discovered it. This is often not the case as the criminals work to hide the evidence and sell to unknowing buyers. That's where Elementary Property Inspections can help. There are several indicators that we look for during a home inspection to determine whether or not the home is a former grow op. If you are viewing or showing a home and have suspicions that it was previously a grow op, contact Elementary Property Inspections to provide some direction of what to look for in the home or to answer any questions that arise.

Impact on the Home

If a home has been used as a grow op, the negative impact can be quite severe. In addition to the cost to repair the direct damage to the home, its market value may be affected for many years. Some home owners that have discovered extensive grow ops in their homes have gone so far as to tear down and rebuild to remove the stigma.

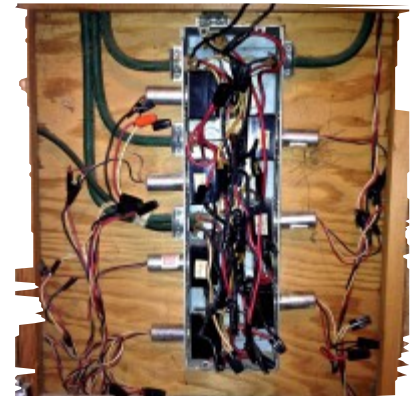
Physical Damage

Grow ops are usually short term operations with no concern for the future viability or safety of the building. This leads to some common structural issues;

Electrical - The need for extensive lighting systems to grow the crop often leads to the home's electrical supply being modified - to bypass the meter. This is done both to save the cost of the electricity and to avoid detection, as a big increase in electricity demand will trigger a concerned response from the local electrical utility if noticed. Plus, this electricity is often carried to the crop's lighting, watering equipment, etc. through wiring that was installed improperly and unsafely – a physical concern and a fire hazard.

Heating and Ventilation System – Crops grow best when they are warm and moist. To achieve this climate indoors, grow ops often have modified ventilation systems that do not conform to safety guidelines and have not been installed properly, let alone inspected.

Mould – Possibly the worst problem that grow ops cause is mould. Depending on the size of the grow op and how long it had been operating, mould damage can be very extreme and impact many different areas of a home. On the surface, mould can mar walls, floors and ceilings. Resurfacing these is a lot of work and a big expense, but it is mould's ability to get behind the walls and ceilings and into vents and attic spaces that can prove most costly.



Reparation Options

If a home has been identified as a grow op and has extensive damage, police can issue an Order to Remedy an Unsafe Building. The items mentioned in the order must be remedied and inspected before anyone can live in the building again. They may also have the electricity disconnected until it is deemed safe to turn back on, adding to a homeowner's

work to remediate. Returning a home that has been used as a grow op to a livable state can be a lot of work and expense. Thankfully there are companies that specialize in professional grow op remediation. Their experience and expertise in handling these situations can reduce the amount of time the home is out of commission.

How to Spot an Active Grow Op

Though grow ops operators work hard to disguise their indoor plantations, there are signs that can surface. In fact, grow ops are often discovered by neighbours who have noticed unusual things and have expressed their concerns to police, including;

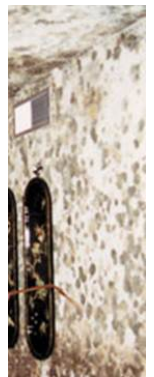
- A pungent, musty smell is often the first sign there is something awry, but the odours can be hard to pinpoint because the venting is often exhausted out the roof where smells can be dispersed by the wind more quickly.
- Poorly maintained yard; grass not cut regularly in summer, snow not shoveled in a timely manner in winter.
- Few if any bags at the curb on garbage day.
- Little or no snow accumulation on the roof.
- Unusual access, such as people using something other than the front door for entry to the home.
- Obvious tampering – exposed wiring and connections - at the hydro meter.
- Lack of normal activity at the home, such as few people visiting or staying for only an hour or two when they do.
- Windows that have been completely covered up. A lot of condensation on inside of windows.

What to Look For when Buying

Home buyers in Ontario are somewhat protected from unwittingly buying a home that was a former grow op because the Real Estate Council of Ontario (RECO) requires it's members to disclose any material fact about a property that they are aware of that could affect a person's decision to buy. This includes former grow ops, but again, only when it was disclosed or disbanded by the police.

Because home sellers cannot always be counted on to disclose unsavoury information like the home's grow op history, when viewing homes be mindful of signs of excessive moisture such as stains near soffit and roof vents, warped and blistered trim paint in interior, surface mould and strong musty smell. Other concerns include tampered electrical panel and recently repaired holes in basement walls or floors.

Of course, many of these signs can be covered up by sellers anxious to hide the home's past. To help guard against this, have a complete home inspection. Elementary Property Inspections can help spot trouble signs and know where to look for mould and signs of moisture. Other inconsistencies may also be spotted during the inspection.



Why would anyone buy a former grow op?

Most people would not even consider purchasing a former grow op. Even after thorough professional remediation, former grow ops can sell for considerably less than market value by as much as 25 %. This stigma can remain for many years, but if you have a purchaser that is anxious to buy in a particular neighbourhood and they plan to live there for many years, time will work to their advantage.

Contact Elementary Property Inspections for more information about this article or to schedule a complete home inspection, mould and air quality inspection or Ozone shock treatment.



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