



A Guest Article from Florida's Agriculture Commissioner

The Florida Domestic Marijuana Eradication (DME) Program

*Charles H.
Bronson*

I would like to thank the Police Benevolent Association for inviting me to write a guest column for your fine organization. My roots in law enforcement extend back many years. I served as a Metro Dade County reserve deputy in the late 1970's and continued to support law enforcement issues as a state senator. Specifically, I supported bills increasing benefits for police officers such as the presumption bills and pay increases. I sponsored legislation allowing for a deputy sheriff to hold active their law enforcement certificate if they held elected office; co-sponsored legislation expanding the rights of officers during internal review investigations; sponsored legislation enhancing the penalty of using a police scanner to avoid detection during a crime or for impersonating an officer; and cosponsored legislation enhancing retirement benefits based on prior service.

Editor's Note:
**Commissioner
Bronson has been
the greatest on law
enforcement issues!**
~David

I have been watching with concern the discussions by Tallahassee City Commissioners about possible police department layoffs because of the budget crunch. I'm certain similar discussions are playing out in city and county governments across the state. Unfortunately, recessions result in an increase in crime and therefore it's an inopportune time to be reducing manpower within law enforcement agencies. It is more important than ever that we use our funding as wisely as possible. That is why I am especially proud of the Florida Domestic Marijuana Eradication (DME) Program administered by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement (OALE) in cooperation with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

This federally funded program supports law enforcement agencies across the state with costs associated with detection and eradication of both indoor and outdoor marijuana growing operations. Since the DME Program started in 1981, Florida has set national standards for other states to follow. Initially, the program targeted outdoor growing operations. Many drug dealers adapted by moving their marijuana operations indoors. Florida's DME Program expanded and is recognized for its specialized training in both aerial surveillance and indoor grow investigations.

AgLaw joined the program in 2005, first coordinating investigations involving marijuana grown outdoors and assuming responsibility for indoor grow operations in January, 2008, which was previously coordinated by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. I am proud to say that during 2008, as a result of the hard work of law enforcement agencies across the state, Florida was ranked number one in the nation in the number of indoor grow sites eradicated. AgLaw has taken its responsibility to coordinate the DME very seriously and we greatly appreciate the wonderful cooperation and coordination that occurs in these multi agency operations.

Law enforcement agencies in Florida that participate in the DME Program are eligible for funding to help offset the

costs of marijuana eradication. In 2008, the federal government provided grants totaling \$415,000 for marijuana eradication cost reimbursements and for training. Law agencies reported the eradication of 94,500 marijuana plants in 56 counties and made 1,223 arrests. It is also important to note that the value of assets seized by law agencies in 2008 totaled more than 7.2 million dollars, an excellent return on the investment.

The DME Program also gives Florida more bang for its buck in the area of training. This year, AgLaw hosted three Indoor Cannabis Investigation Schools, providing training to 180 participants from 45 different law enforcement agencies, including DEA agents from around the nation. AgLaw also hosted an Outdoor Investigations/Spotter School for 13 law enforcement agencies. Training topics ranged from investigative techniques and evidence gathering to legal issues and forfeiture laws.

People intent on growing marijuana are continuing to develop innovative techniques to avoid detection and keep the drug trade going. The Florida DME Program is critical to ensuring that law enforcement agencies have the funding and training necessary to try and stay one step ahead in the ongoing battle to eradicate marijuana from our state. AgLaw will continue its commitment to ensuring law enforcement agencies are given the opportunity to receive first-rate training and help with operational funds through the DME process.

This is just one example of how counties and municipalities can take advantage of available assistance to keep their law enforcement officers on the cutting edge of crime fighting techniques without being forced to sacrifice other important public safety programs.

If you are interested in finding out more about how the Florida DME Program can benefit your agency, contact Judith Ivester, DME Program Support, by email at ivestej@doacs.state.fl.us or call 1-800-342-5869. There is also information about the program on the AgLaw website at www.fl-aglaw.com/bas/dme.html. ●

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