

Police in 'eco terrorists' cannabis farmers row

By **David Pollard**

ENVIRONMENTALISTS have hit out at police claims that cannabis farmers are eco-terrorists.

Sgt John Fryer, of Colne police, said the amount of electricity needed to grow the drug seriously damaged the environment.

A 27-year-old man received a caution after special operations units helped neighbourhood officers to execute a drugs warrant in James Street, Colne. Growing equipment and 71 plants were discovered in a bedroom.

The man faces further investigation by United Utilities on suspicion of bypassing the electricity meter.

Sgt Fryer said, in a case earlier this year, £1,800-worth of electricity had been stolen to power lamps and fans for three months.

"Cannabis-smoking types tend to be hippies who are into Save the Whales and looking after the environment," he said.

"Everyone is concerned about reducing their carbon footprint, yet we get these clowns using up three years' worth of electricity in a month or two just so they can get off their heads. The greenhouse gasses they must emit to grow this stuff will be horrendous. These people are environmental terrorists."

Pendle Friends of the Earth co-ordinator Mr Brian Jackson, of Winewall, backed the prosecution of people who steal electricity, but accused Sgt Fryer of missing the point.

"Growing marijuana is not an environmental issue," he said. "Using electricity is, but linking the two like that is outrageous and ill-informed.

"If cannabis was such a major issue and a menace to society, then all these people arrested for growing would be getting more than cautions.

"If the police and the Government really are concerned about carbon footprints, they should allow people to grow it at home, for their own use, so they wouldn't need to harm the environment or mix with potentially dangerous criminals."

Police had been criticised for carrying out so many raids on cannabis farms. It was seen by some as a waste of taxpayers' money, mainly because most of the offenders only received cautions.

Sgt Fryer said: "I can understand the public's point of view to an extent, but there's more to it than that.

"People don't get their equipment back, which hits them hard, and they know they will get more than a caution if they're caught again. Bypassing meters is dangerous and irresponsible. They could burn the house down, putting themselves and their neighbours at risk.

"Cannabis is difficult to get hold of in Colne now, which shows we are being successful.

"I'm sick and tired of people slagging us off and asking us why we're bothering. If encouraging people to change their behaviour means doing a raid every day, we will do a raid every day."

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<http://www.pendletoday.co.uk/colne-news/Police-in-eco-terrorists-cannabis.3439890.jp>