

National Public Radio - June 7, 2010

400 Marijuana Dispensaries To Close In Los Angeles

Los Angeles is home to hundreds of medical marijuana dispensaries, but concern over their proliferation has provoked a backlash. Police are cracking down on most of them starting Monday.

A new city ordinance limits the number and locations of medical marijuana dispensaries allowed to operate in Los Angeles. Those that registered with the city before a 2007 moratorium may be able to remain in business. But they can't be near schools, libraries, parks and other sensitive areas. Police officers will begin closing down 400 unregistered dispensaries now operating illegally.

"The sky isn't going to fall down," says Asha Greenberg, assistant city attorney. "LAPD isn't going to go around kicking down doors, etc. Initially we're going to be doing information gathering."

Greenberg says L.A.'s new ordinance makes it a misdemeanor to run a dispensary without city approval.

"Anyone who is operating a medical marijuana establishment, who is violating the city's ordinance is subject to arrest," Greenberg says.

Dispensary owners and patients have filed more than 20 lawsuits against the city, arguing that the ordinance is unconstitutional because it prohibits access to their medicine. So far, their attempts at temporary restraining orders have been turned down in court.

"It's like treating us like drug dealers," says Darcy Hughes, who used to manage the dispensary B Green. "It's not right."

B Green closed because of the new law. Hughes agrees that there were far too many unregulated dispensaries in Los Angeles, but she and her patients don't know where they'll get their medicine.

"I think the city is a little embarrassed about what happened," Hughes adds. "This is what they're trying to do to fix the situation. I think they got a little harsh. Unfortunately, I'll see a rise in street [sales] — back to the way it was before the dispensaries."

Under the new ordinance, those who illegally sell medical marijuana in Los Angeles could face daily fines, a \$1,000 penalty and six months in jail.