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## **Hundreds of L.A. pot dispensaries to face closure**

**Under a city ordinance expected to take effect in June, marijuana collectives that opened after a 2007 moratorium will be notified that they must shut down.**

By John Hoeffel

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Hundreds of Los Angeles medical marijuana dispensaries will soon be notified that they must shut down in June, when the city's ordinance to control the stores is expected to take effect.

On Friday, the City Council approved the last piece of its ordinance, the fees that dispensaries will pay to operate, ending a drawn-out legislative process and a legal vacuum that allowed dispensaries to spread unchecked. The council first started to debate marijuana dispensaries nearly five years ago and took almost two years from the time it first received a draft ordinance to adopt the final version.

"It was the wild, Wild West for weed in Los Angeles for some time, and we are going in the direction to finally take control of the situation," said Councilman Jose Huizar, who pressed for some of the toughest restrictions after residents in Eagle Rock complained about the proliferation of dispensaries.

The council approved the medical marijuana ordinance in January, but it cannot be enforced until the fees are approved by the mayor and published.

That is expected to be around June 4.

Under the ordinance, the only dispensaries that can remain in business are those that registered when the city adopted a moratorium in 2007 and are still in business. City officials have estimated that number is 137. All other collectives will receive warning letters after the mayor signs the law and cease-and-desist letters in June.

Operators of the dispensaries that would be forced to shut down have been weighing their options. At least 25 dispensaries plan to file lawsuits next week. "We believe we have a legitimate right to exist," said Dan Halbert, who runs Rainforest Collective in Mar Vista.

David Welch, the attorney representing the 25 collectives, said the suits would challenge the preferential treatment for collectives that registered under the moratorium. He noted that a Los Angeles County Superior Court judge has ruled that the City Council illegally extended the moratorium, so the ban was not in place when most dispensaries opened.

Only a few medical marijuana activists showed up for the council's vote. Most were dispensary operators who will be allowed to stay open. They complained the ordinance was too restrictive, saying many operators have not found sites that comply with the location requirements.

"It has a lot of holes that need to be plugged up, and if they don't get plugged up, we may end up without an ordinance, and that would be the worst thing that could happen in Los Angeles today," said Yamileth Bolanos, who runs PureLife Alternative Wellness Center and heads an association of collectives.

Bill Rosendahl was the only council member to vote against the fees. He lambasted the ordinance as too prohibitive.

"I think it's just totally insane and over the top," he said.

Huizar said the council could amend the ordinance. "We will see how it works in practical terms and come back and adjust it if we have to," he said.

The dispensary fees were not controversial. In addition to standard costs, a manager registering a dispensary would have to pay about \$1,200 in special fees. Huizar called them "reasonable and sensible."