

1. INFORMATION

This advice sheet looks at the often, wrongly perceived, human health effects from the naturally pungent aroma of cannabis and cannabis plants transported and retained within police premises prior to destruction and/or disposal.

- a. Cannabis consists of the dried leaves of the hemp plant that are smoked and/or chewed for euphoric effects.
- b. The psychotic effects of the active ingredient of cannabis Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) can only be obtained from smoking or orally ingesting the plants. You cannot get a 'high' just being in the vicinity of the cannabis plants.
- c. You cannot get a 'high' from handling the plants as there is negligible absorption of THC through the skin. When handling fresh plants, no personal protective equipment such as gloves are required although they may still be necessary due to general dirty conditions in the growing area and/or trichomes on the stems of cannabis plants that can irritate the skin if handling or carrying plants with bare hands/arms.



Trichomes on cannabis plant

- d. In a similar vein when handling dry cannabis plant materials, it is not necessary to wear respiratory protective equipment. Tests undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive on general dust levels showed no significant issues with exposure levels being well below recognised work exposure limits. This was tested in a drying area of a large cannabis crop in the designated professional growing facility.
- e. However, any green/wet plant matter will tend to rot if it is stored in sealed bags. This rotting process could release methane gas which would present the risk of an explosive atmosphere in poorly ventilated areas.

- f. There is also a potential for the formation of fungal spores in composting plant matter. There is a potential for these spores to be released when handling composted or partially composted plant matter whereby inhalation may cause an allergenic reaction in some people. 'Nuisance' dust masks (FFP3) may be used if someone is personally susceptible to dust and/or if there is powdery mildew/spores in a rotting crop.
- g. Cannabis plants are naturally pungent depending on the sex, variety and stages of growth and climatic growth conditions. Cannabis smell is not toxic as it is an essential oil, but the odour and heat can cause nausea to some people. These effects are self limiting and exposure to fresh air will usually cause the effects to subside.
- h. Respiratory health effects from the naturally pungent plants are insignificant and self-limiting. Inhalation is not a recognised route of entry to the body. Cannabis can only enter the body via the 'red' areas i.e. mouth (through smoking), stomach (through eating).
- i. Green/wet plant matter must be dried in appropriate circumstances before it is stored. It should never be stored wet in shipping containers, basements of buildings or non-ventilated areas.
- j. Cannabis will not affect you when driving a vehicle or transporting it from the scene to the storage location (unless of course you have consumed or smoked it).
- k. Cannabis plants do not deplete oxygen in air and do not naturally form confined spaces (although such a hazard may still exist depending on the location of the cannabis growing areas i.e. in buried underground containers).

For further information on cannabis seizure, storage, retention and destruction, please refer to Force Policy Ref: 713/2011.