



More co-op on grow ops

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TREB PRESIDENT'S COLUMN AS IT APPEARS IN THE TORONTO SUN

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In recent years, the Greater Toronto Area has seen the rise of indoor marijuana grow operations: illegal activity that uses innocent-looking properties to grow millions of dollars worth of marijuana. Often, these are sophisticated operations, run by organized crime, right in the middle of average middle and upper middle class neighbourhoods. According to the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP), indoor marijuana grow operations can, and have been, set up in a wide variety of buildings including detached homes, apartments, and industrial warehouses.

While the vast majority of homes are never used as marijuana grow operations, it is important for homebuyers to be aware of this potential because the effects of these operations can have serious health and safety impacts that persist even after the illegal activity has ended. For example, the humid environment associated with the growing can create toxic levels of mould. Also, stresses and alterations to the electrical system could increase future risk of fire.

REALTORS® have worked hard to help address this issue. Efforts by the Toronto Real Estate Board (TREB) have included:

- creating standard clauses that can be inserted into agreements of purchase and sale to help provide legal assurance for both homebuyers and sellers;
- educating REALTORS® and their clients about these properties;
- organizing forums to bring together government and law enforcement to find solutions;
- participating in a provincial government task force on this issue through our provincial association, the Ontario Real Estate Association; and,
- lobbying governments at all levels for action.

Fortunately, some government action has been taken. Most notably, the provincial government enacted a law that requires municipalities to inspect these properties, once they have been dismantled by police, and ensure that they meet building code requirements. This was a good step, but more is needed.

REALTORS® have called on the provincial government to implement a province-wide registry of former grow operations, which would help prevent unsuspecting homebuyers from being victimized. REALTORS® are not the only ones calling for this. Toronto City Council has also asked the Province to implement a grow house registry.

Grow house information is already being provided in some municipalities. For example, Ottawa Police recently announced that they will make this information available to the public. The London, Ontario Police also provides this information to the public. While this shows that this action can be taken, a province-wide rather than a patch-work approach, would better protect consumers.

When shopping for a home, it is not fair to expect homebuyers to guess about something as serious as potential criminal activity. The Toronto Real Estate Board and REALTORS® will continue to press the provincial government to provide homebuyers with the information they deserve.

Maureen O'Neill is President of the Toronto Real Estate Board, a professional association that represents 28,000 REALTORS® in the Greater Toronto Area.