

Pot Radio: Traffic, Weather And Drug Bust Tips

June 8, 2010 12:00 AM ET

URL: <https://www.npr.org/2010/06/08/127538267/pot-radio-traffic-weather-and-drug-bust-tips>

DEBORAH AMOS, Host:

Unidentified Man #1: Okay, when you come down into that first road, don't forget to work your way to the north to that real large cutoff over in the trees.

(SOUNDBITE OF HELICOPTER)

AMOS: By midsummer, the Marijuana Irradiation Campaign is in full swing, with agents in low-flying choppers scouring the countryside for illegal pot farms. And for a quarter century, local groups have responded by monitoring and reporting in real time on these drug raids. But now there's a debate about whether that should continue. Michael Montgomery has our story.

MICHAEL MONTGOMERY: One characteristic of northern California's pot war is radio broadcasts, like this one.

(SOUNDBITE OF RADIO BROADCAST)

AMOS: According to a citizen's observation, at 8:45 a.m. this morning, three helicopters were seen headed from Laytonville towards Bell Springs Road.

MONTGOMERY: The report alert listeners - some of them legal and illegal pot growers - the movement of drug agents on the ground and in the air.

(SOUNDBITE OF RADIO BROADCAST)

MONTGOMERY: To report sightings such as these, you can call the Civil Liberties Monitoring Project at 923...

MONTGOMERY: KMUD program director Marianne Knorzer says the reports are part of the station's commitment to progressive politics, government accountability and public safety.

MARIANNE KNORZER: We're not actually broadcasting their whole operations. We're just giving the public an awareness that there are 10 trucks heading down a very narrow road with one-lane portions of it, with tight turns. Again, our reports are quite benign.

MONTGOMERY: Mendocino County Sheriff Tom Allman worries that the radio reports could tip them off.

TOM ALLMAN: I hope they're not going to say: This is my land, don't come here. But what if it did happen? What if somebody did get hurt? Either that citizen or a law enforcement officer. Who would have blood on their hands?

MONTGOMERY: Allman wants the broadcasts to end.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

MONTGOMERY: As a man with a matted beard and wizened face played a violin outside the meeting hall, Allman tried to strike a conciliatory note. He acknowledged past abuses by police and expressed a wariness at federal drug operations.

ALLMAN: I don't like Black Hawks in my county. I really don't. But if we lost a local, or a state or federal law enforcement officer, when it was determined that a local radio station had broadcast they were coming up the driveway, I believe we're setting ourselves up for something bad.

MONTGOMERY: Allman's appeal to rethink the broadcasts was met with polite skepticism from the audience, including activist Jared Rossman.

JARED ROSSMAN: I congratulate law enforcement for responding, because there were a lot of years of intense fear. Have any law enforcement people - local or state or federal - been hurt in these two counties over these 20 years?

ALLMAN: Last year was the first year that, in a decade, that we actually took rounds. It was a total Mexican grow, there's no question about it. We're finding notes. We're getting death threats in ways that we never got before. We're seeing a resistance now that we haven't seen, ever.

(SOUNDBITE OF RADIO BROADCAST)

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

KMUD: You're listening to Redwood Community Radio KMUD...

MONTGOMERY: KMUD occupies a rambling, one-story house just behind a gas station in the tiny hamlet of Redway. In some ways, the station reflects how the debate over marijuana has shifted, with more people accepting the idea of legal, medical pot - including Sheriff Allman, who's a frequent guest on KMUD.

ALLMAN: I hope I don't come across as a Cheech and Chong sheriff. But I do say the same things over and over, that everybody has their rights. And the days of cops going in and slash-and-burning are over, and they will never come back.

MONTGOMERY: The cops' grudging respect for legal pot growers is a big reason Allman says KMUD's reports on police operations are an anachronism. Maybe they were justified years ago,

but not today. Still, his concern about the broadcasts doesn't mean he's is threatening legal action - at least not yet.

ALLMAN: I'm not talking about going to the FCC and saying take away their license. That's not my intent. My intent is to figure out a solution where everybody is satisfied. They don't have to be happy, but they're satisfied with the solution.

MONTGOMERY: But KMUD's Marianne Knorzner says suspicion over the drug war still runs high, and the station is unlikely to drop their reports.

KNORZER: I can't ever imagine that happening.

MONTGOMERY: For NPR News, I'm Michael Montgomery.

AMOS: Our story was produced as part of a collaboration between member station KQED and the Center for Investigative Reporting's California Watch.

Copyright © 2010 NPR. All rights reserved. Visit our website [terms of use and permissions](#) pages at www.npr.org for further information.

NPR transcripts are created on a rush deadline by an NPR contractor. This text may not be in its final form and may be updated or revised in the future. Accuracy and availability may vary. The authoritative record of NPR's programming is the audio record.