

LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT




KRISTIN M. CROWLEY
FIRE CHIEF

April 17, 2023

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
FILE NO. 23-042

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners

FROM:  Kristin M. Crowley, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: ILLEGAL CANNABIS UNIT OVERVIEW 2023

FINAL ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

SUMMARY

The information in this report outlines the fire prevention activities of the Illegal Cannabis Unit in the Fire Prevention and Public Safety Bureau (FPB).

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board:
Receive and File.

DISCUSSION

Following the passing of Proposition 215 for Medical Marijuana use and the subsequent passing of Proposition 64 for the sale and manufacturing of cannabis for personal use, the City of Los Angeles provided funding in 2018 for the Cannabis Unit within the FPB to oversee and conduct annual compliance for legal cannabis operations. In October of 2019, additional funding was provided to form the Illegal Cannabis Enforcement Unit (ICEU) to assist in the investigation and execution of warrants for the interdepartmental task force that is comprised of the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD), the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety (LADBS) and the Department of Water and Power (DWP).

Unit Staffing

The ICEU was placed under the Legal Unit in the Administrative Section of the FPB and was initially comprised of one Management Analyst, one Administrative Clerk, four Fire Inspector I and four Fire Inspector II positions. The unit later lost several inspector positions and expense funding due to the fiscal restraints resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The positions were restored in FY 2021-22 and the unit has since expanded to include five Fire Inspector I and five Fire Inspector II positions.

Below are the current positions that are allocated to the ICEU and their duties and responsibilities:

Illegal Cannabis Enforcement Unit Staffing

Classification	Position Count
Fire Inspector I	5
Fire Inspector II	5
Management Analyst	1
Administrative Clerk	1

Unit Duties and Responsibilities

The Fire Inspector I position is responsible for the following duties:

- Inspections of any/all illegal cannabis related farming/growing, manufacturing and by-product extraction, heating, fumigation chambers, low voltage fire warning systems and dust collecting systems.
- Conduct detailed and complex fire and life safety inspections of Cannabis related industrial and commercial facilities including hazardous materials storage and processing equipment, power supply and consumption equipment and general facilities.
- Research, develop and compile comprehensive notices of Fire and Life Safety Violation Notices.
- Issue Final Notice of compliance, obtain photographs that clearly identify violations, prepare proper documentation for the Legal Liaison Unit for court action. Posting (closing) operations/occupancies until correction of the unsafe condition(s) is made or until court decisions are rendered.
- Responsible for using the authority of the Los Angeles City Fire Code, local, State and Federal laws to inform the public of their respective legal responsibilities to maintain a safe and hazard-free work environment.
- Coordinates with LAPD, LADBS, DWP and other city entities to ensure cessation of illegal operations and to minimize recurrent violations.

The Fire Inspector II position is responsible for the following duties:

- Conducts training and quality assurance of personnel engaged in conducting inspections and investigations in the enforcement of Illegal Cannabis facility inspections, investigations and enforcement.
- Attends meetings with internal and external stakeholders on Cannabis and Legal related issues; meetings also include community outreach and public meetings.
- Performs or accompanies Fire Inspector I's on more complex and/or sensitive inspections.
- Develops solutions to the technological needs of the ICE program.
- Attends Unified Program meetings and coordinates ICE program committee meetings to enhance the operations of the Legal Unit.
- Assists the Administrative Section Chief and the Legal Unit Captain in the preparation of ICE evaluations.

The Management Analyst and Administrative Clerk positions provide administrative support consisting of:

- Preparing various reports and statistical data including Federal, State and Local reports.
- Assist in the development and maintenance of procedures. Analyzes workloads for trends affecting productivity.
- Prepare annual budget requests and maintain records of accounts.
- Data entry into Fire Department databases and other relevant databases for Illegal Cannabis Enforcement.
- Assist customers via the public counter and phone with general questions on Cannabis permitting.
- Assists with legal files submitted to the City Attorney and responds to inquiries on the status of cases, business ownership and general questions.

Warrant and Inspection Process

The ICEU coordinates with the LAPD in the execution of illegal cannabis warrants. The process is as follows:

- LAPD Narcotics will obtain a search warrant and notify the ICEU.
- The ICEU will obtain an administrative warrant that addresses all fire and life safety violations.
- The ICEU Inspectors will serve their administrative warrant in conjunction with LAPD's search warrant.
- This warrant of an illegal cannabis facility will result in a Forthwith Criminal case that will be forwarded to the City Attorney's Office.
- The Illegal cannabis facility will be shut down following the warrant being executed.
- The City Attorney's Office will contact ICEU for court ordered re-inspections once the property is in court.

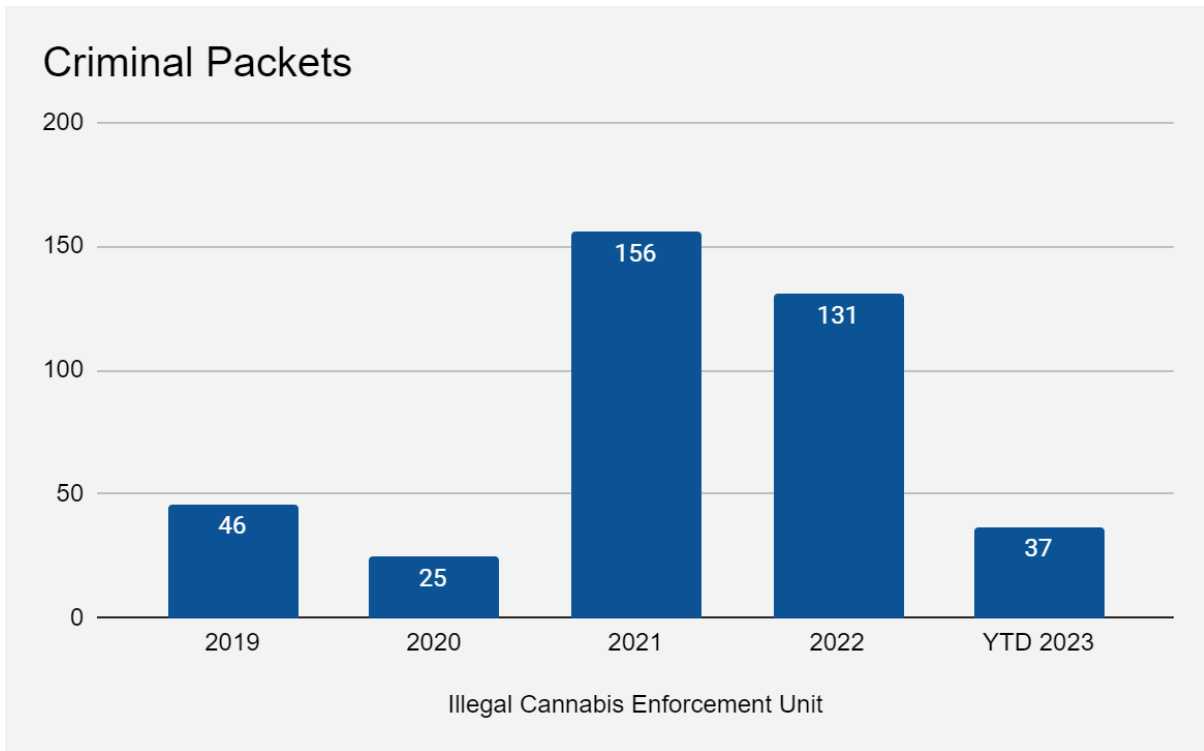
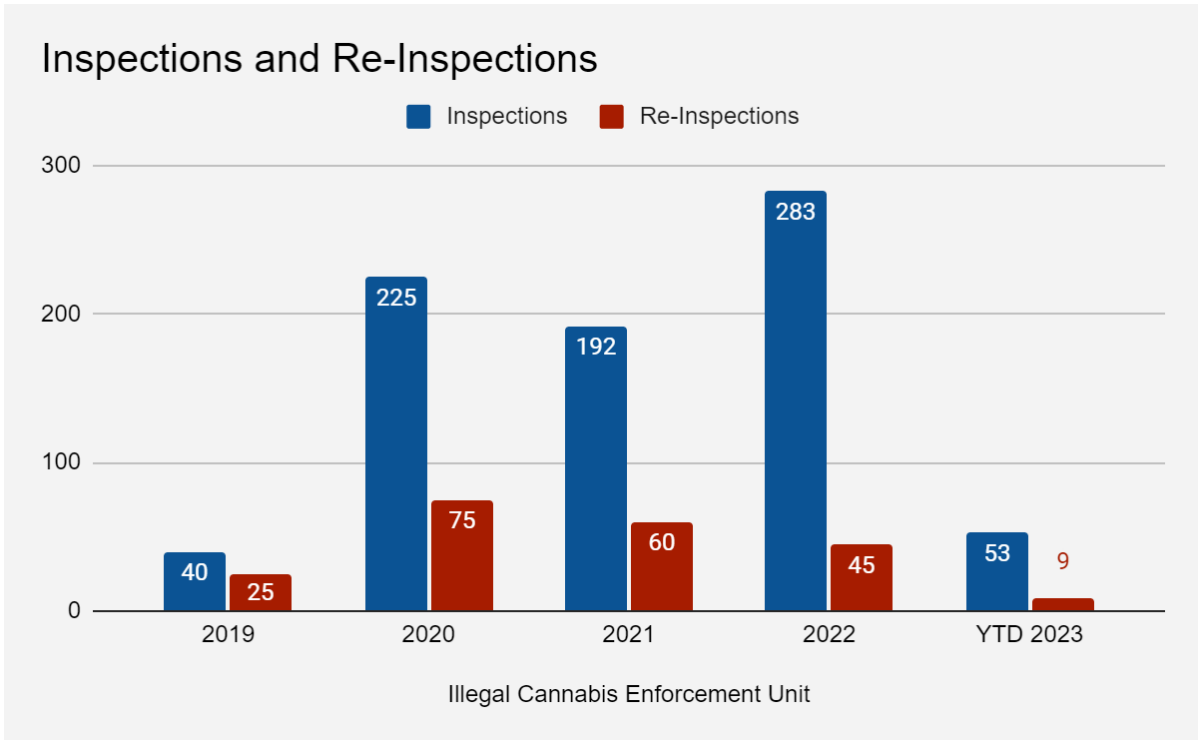
Cannabis Fire and After-Action Reports (AAR)

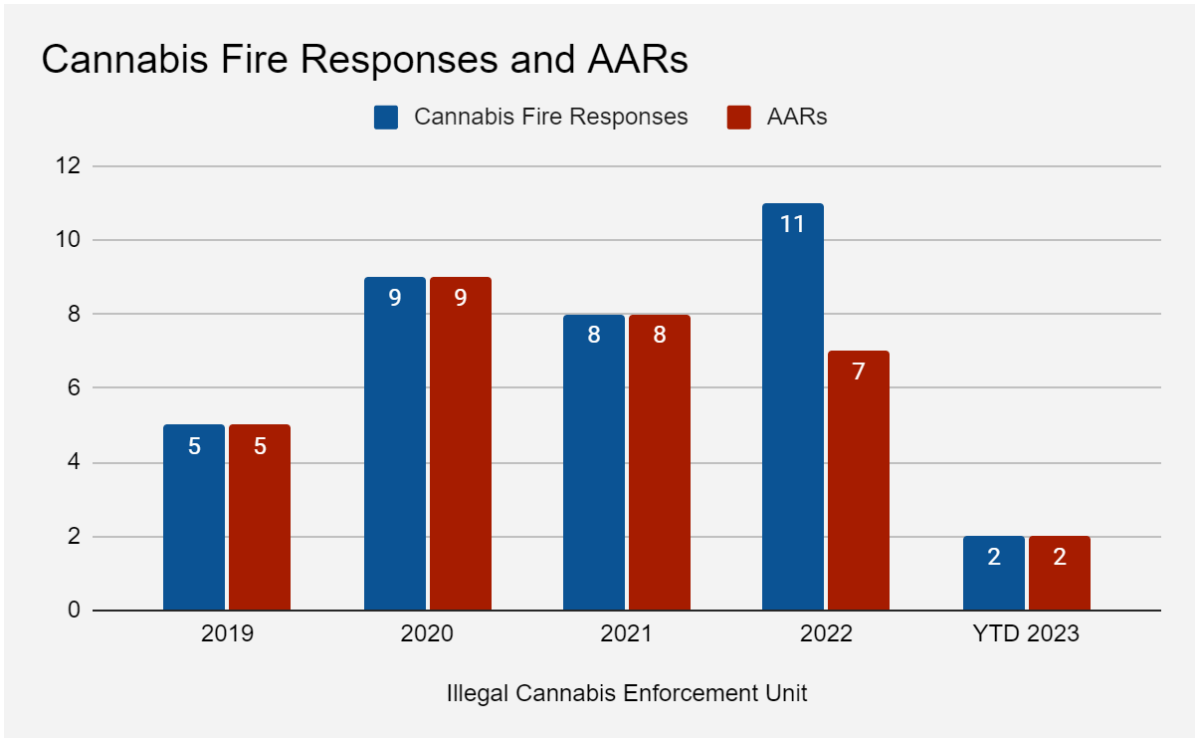
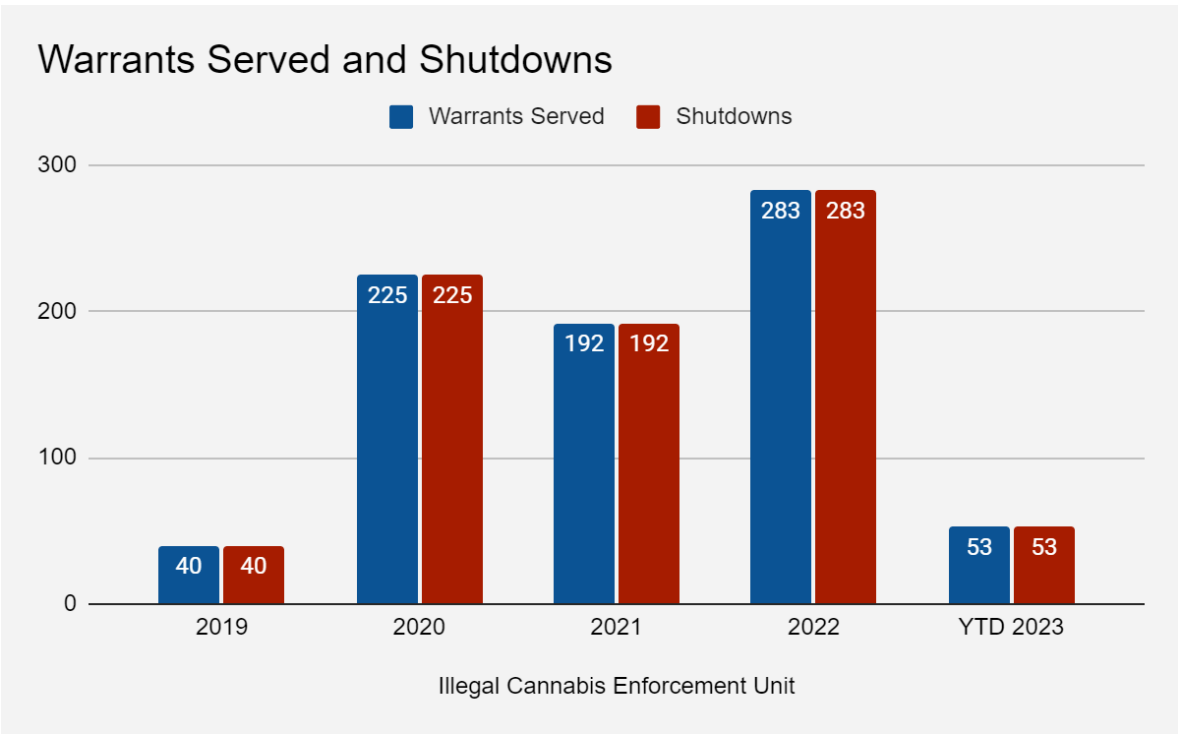
The ICEU is notified of all cannabis related structure fires. The process for cannabis related fires is as follows:

- The notification will come from the floor Captain at the Metropolitan Fire Communications or the Incident Commander at the structure fire.
- The on-call inspector will respond to the structure fire and conduct an after-action report of the fire.
- The Illegal Cannabis Unit will inspect the building and create a criminal packet addressing all fire and life safety violations.

Unit Statistics

The ICEU began tracking unit activity in 2019 and has steadily increased its activity numbers as the unit has expanded. The exception to this trend occurred in 2021 due to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.





Unit Challenges

The ICEU is continually seeking to improve processes and efficiencies. Areas of improvement have been identified in the current staffing model, communication and reporting.

The current staffing model has the ICEU members reporting to the Legal Unit Captain II. The complexity of all the legal cases requires intensive research and review by its members and its Captain. The Captain II assigned to the unit is responsible for three distinct units for a total staff count of twenty-two members. Each unit is responsible for detail-oriented work that requires special knowledge. Two additional Captain I positions each dedicated to the Regulation 4 and ICEU would assist in improving unit efficiencies.

Legal Unit Supervisor Captain II ICEU Staff

Unit	Classification	Position Count
Illegal Cannabis Enforcement	Fire Inspector I	5
Illegal Cannabis Enforcement	Fire Inspector II	5
Illegal Cannabis Enforcement	Management Analyst	1
Illegal Cannabis Enforcement	Administrative Clerk	1
Total ICEU Staff		12

Communication across City departments is challenging and has not allowed for complete tracking and reporting of repeat offenders. The Legal Unit is addressing these challenges by revisiting and restructuring current methods of data collection for improved reporting. The addition of the new FIMS 2.0 program currently in development will further aid in the Legal Unit’s data collection, tracking and overall efficiencies.

CONCLUSION

The Illegal Cannabis Enforcement Unit is committed to mitigating the risks that illegal cannabis operations present to the City of Los Angeles and its members. Continued focus on tracking of repeat offenders, improved technology and unit expansion will aid in ensuring the fire/life safety and world class service that is expected from the Los Angeles Fire Department.

Board report prepared by Anthony Hardaway, Battalion Chief, Fire Prevention and Public Safety Bureau.