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## **DA sees rising value of drug-related asset seizures**

Cash value of assets seized from illegal drug trafficking in or passing through Mendocino County continued to rise during the first six months of 2011, underscoring what prosecutors say is law enforcement's increasing ability to track ill-gotten gains of the underground drug economy.

District Attorney David Eyster said the value of seized cash and other assets found during the investigation of largely marijuana-related crimes climbed to \$645,889 during the first six months of this year, up more than \$200,000 from the same period in 2010. The DA's office in each county oversees the statewide asset forfeiture program.

Eyster said, "The good news is there will be incrementally more money available for distribution to local and state agencies to help defray public safety costs."

Yet Eyster noted that the rising figures also reflect the continuing flow of money into and through the county because of chronic drug-related activities,

Eyster credited the local law enforcement agencies for their ongoing efforts to improve strategies for interdiction of the underground drug economy revolving largely around non-medicinal, for-profit marijuana operations.

"These days the law enforcement officers out in the field are much more in tune with the financial aspects of illegal profiteering activities," said Eyster.

The state's asset forfeiture laws are designed to deprive illegal drug operations of ill-gotten gains, and divert the money into public safety programs at the county and state levels.

In Mendocino County, consistently one of the state's biggest producers of marijuana, the total value of seized grower assets for the year is expected to soar past \$1 million. While 24 percent of the money flows into the state's general fund under a complex distribution formula, tens of thousands of dollars are distributed to local law enforcement agencies.

The drug money in turned is used to help offset taxpayers' costs, and support community-based drug and gang prevention programs.

Eyster said, for example, that he has approved allocations of asset forfeiture monies distributed to his office to help fund a diverse group of local-based programs, including the Mendocino County Youth Project, Sober Grad nights at the local high schools, anti-drug signage, and an alliance of local volunteers working to reclaim marijuana growing locations operations uncovered on public lands.

Eyster said seizing cash from drug traffickers and profiteers and using the money to underwrite public safety and preventative programs is an effective law enforcement tool.

"We like being able to hit the crooks and profiteers where it hurts," quipped Eyster.