

Conditions expected to be attached to eradication grant

Full council meets today in Kailua-Kona

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West Hawaii Today

HILO — Puna Councilman Gary Safarik said he expects repeat his move to attach conditions to a \$265,000 marijuana eradication grant that goes before the County Council today at its meeting in Kona.

The council meeting scheduled to start at 9 a.m. at King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Hotel.

Safarik added certain conditions to a previous eradication grant approved by the council in March.

The conditions required Big Island police to file reports with the council, including the area in which missions were conducted, the number of plants eradicated and the number of complaints received, as well as directing police to begin eradication efforts outside residential areas.

It also required helicopters to fly higher than 1,000 feet unless police have probable cause to search for marijuana.

"(The rules) are working for the most part," Safarik said.

'When I was up there it shocked me. We've got crowded skies over Puna.' — Gary Safarik, Puna Councilman



One change Safarik said he might consider is lower altitude helicopters' must maintain on the missions to 700 or 800 feet.

Safarik said a large number of commercial helicopter fly at 1,000 feet, which presents safety concerns.

Safarik accompanied police on a mission last month to see the operation first hand.

He said at one point, he observed other helicopters come within 500 feet of the police chopper.

"When I was up there it shocked me," said Safarik. "We've got crowded skies over Puna."

Lt. Henry Tavares, chief of the police department's vice section, said flying above 1,000 feet sometimes forces the helicopter

to stay in a particular area for a longer period of time, because it more difficult to spot marijuana.

However, he said, police would not object to the conditions if they are added to the upcoming grant.

"It's something we can live with," Tavares said.

On Tuesday, the County Council Finance Committee reviewed the first two reports submitted by police.

Those reports covered missions conducted in April and May.

According to the reports, police eradicated 10,867 plants during those two missions.

They also received eight complaints about helicopter noise.

Tavares said the number of complaints was average.

However, Tavares and Safarik also noted some inconsistencies in some of the complaints.

For example, Tavares said one caller complained about a helicopter in the Mountain View area, while leaving a call back number in Pahoa.

Safarik said someone from Kapoho called to complain about a helicopter flying miles way near the Hawaiian Acres subdivision.

Police also said helicopters are equipped with a radar altimeter, which precisely indicates the altitude of the aircraft.

"I feel confident. I feel comfortable that police are adhering to the guidelines," Safarik said.

Another condition placed on police were to come up with administrative rules covering the eradication missions, as well as rules for handling situation in which a person might have a medical marijuana license.

Kona Councilman Curtis Tyler asked police why he hadn't seen any proposed rules. Police said they were drafted and sent to county attorneys for review.

Tyler asked police about the status of the rules, because he noticed that one of the complaints came from someone in a subdivision.

Police told the committee they didn't conduct any missions in residential areas. However, Tavares explained that they spotted what looked like marijuana and hovered over the area.

Upon closer inspection, police determined that their weren't any marijuana plants in the area, Tavares said.

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