

April 20th, AKA "420" A Marijuana Holiday



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420, Three Weeks Away

This article appeared in the Sacramento Bee April 2002 and was written by Marsha Hart.

Ask teenagers at Sunrise Mall in Citrus Heights what "420" is, and the typical response is evasive. "Uh, I don't know what that is," a number of teens who were hanging out at the mall said Friday night.

"I don't know what you're talking about," others said, blushing. According to www.420.com, "420," pronounced "four-twenty," is a special date (April 20) and time of day for marijuana smokers to light up. The Web site says that 420 was a California tradition in the 1970s that became a nationwide ritual, a lingo and a holiday for cannabis smokers. The origination of the term has been attributed to the police radio code for marijuana smoking in progress, the California penal code section for marijuana use, the day Jim Morrison of the rock group The Doors died and the number of chemicals in marijuana. None are true, according to an article by the San Francisco Chronicle that was posted on the Cannabis News Web site last year.

The most popular myth is that 420 is a police radio code, but that is indicative of teens' desire to believe what they want to believe, said Jon Daily LCSW, CADDC II, a counselor in Fair Oaks, CA. "The kids really believe the origin is this police code," Daily said. "Kids don't know what the effects of drugs are going to be either, but

someone can tell them it will do certain things and they'll believe it." Daily and other counselors say April 20 is a problem. Chemically dependent teenagers celebrate the day like a real holiday, Daily said, and schools are likely to see a long list of absences. "April 20 means a time to get high," Daily said. "For chemically dependent kids, 420 happens every day. Parents and teachers have been in the dark. Kids aren't going to go to school that day. They're going to go get high." California penal code 420 refers to obstructing entry on public land. No police radio code for the Citrus Heights Police Department or the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department includes a 420 code, said Lt. Jim Bell of the Citrus Heights Police Department. Jim Morrison died July 3, 1971, and according to High Times, a drug culture magazine, marijuana has 315 chemical compounds.

Steven Hager, editor of High Times, said the term originated in 1971 at San Rafael High School. A group of about a dozen pot-smoking



students who called themselves the Waldos used the term as the time of day they would meet to light up at a statue of Louis Pasteur on campus.

"Waldo Steve," a former group member who owns a business in San Francisco, told High Times that the Waldos would salute each other in the school hallway

("420" continued)

and say, "420, Louis!" "It was a joke, but it came to mean all kinds of things, like, 'Do you have any?' or 'Do I look stoned?' " he said. "Parents and teachers wouldn't know what we were talking about."

The San Juan Unified School District has taken measures to educate parents, teachers and principals about the date.

"The rumors (that some students are planning to skip school April 20) prompted our biggest push,"



said Joe Tucker, coordinator of attendance improvement with the school district. "A letter has gone out to

administrators and parents making them aware of the issues that surround the date." Students are expected to be in school that day, he said, and off-campus hangouts will be monitored.

"We're putting out a notice to kids, 'You're expected to be at school,' " Tucker said. "Law enforcement is aware of (the significance of the date), as well as the school. If they're caught skipping school, depending on where they are and how many 'cuts' they have, it does pose a risk to the kids. "If it's their first time ever, it would be just a Saturday school (punishment), but if they're habitually truant, it can mean they lose their driver's license or go to juvenile court."

Plenty of companies make money on the term. It can be found on stickers, patches, T-shirts and baseball caps. Clerks at Evangeline's in Old Sacramento say they can't keep some of the items on the shelves. "We have a calling list for some of the T-shirts," said



clerk Jennea Morris. "We can't keep them on the shelf." The 420 items have been popular for quite some time, said

assistant

manager Rob Teresi. He said the items sell well year-round, not just near April 20. "It's been selling good for three or four years," Teresi said.

Parents and professionals can use this information to educate the community about this phenomenon. It is an old issue that hasn't gone away. Certainly parents of drug using kids, probation officers and treatment programs need to have clear expectations with clear consequences about sobriety on this day. It is also important to offer teen drug users alternatives...

I have also found interesting information on this topic at: <http://www.snopes.com/language/stories/420.asp>.

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