

Increase in pot grows tied to rising number of foreclosures

By Ashley Powers, Los Angeles Times

LAS VEGAS – The Ballard house was as unassuming as any in the stucco outskirts of Las Vegas: a two-story box the color of an oatmeal cookie. Police charged inside one night searching for a domestic violence suspect. Instead, they smelled something skunky.

Marijuana. Lots of it.

Two-foot-tall plants fought for space in a hallway, police later testified. Half a dozen jars of buds hid in a closet. The master bedroom was something of a jungle, with two Ballard children, ages 8 and 9, asleep on the bed.

The home – with four bedrooms and 61 plants – was one of the smaller alleged grow operations authorities have dismantled this year. At another home, authorities seized 878 plants worth an estimated \$2.6 million.

Las Vegas has a pot home problem. And like many of the region's maladies, it's tied to the housing slump.

Last year, authorities took down 153 indoor grow sites in Nevada and seized more than 13,000 plants, compared with 18 sites and 1,000 plants in 2005, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration said. (By comparison, California busted 791 indoor sites last year.)

"You can't have crime without opportunity," said William Sousa, a criminologist at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. "And all those empty homes present an opportunity for criminal activity."

Read the whole story