

How Successful is B.C.'s Community Safety Unit?

Caleb McMillan :: 2023-03-02



How successful is B.C.'s [Community Safety Unit](#) (CSU)? How many actions have they taken against [cannabis shops](#)? What are their enforcement rates like? Has the CSU had any mandates or powers expanded since its initial inception?

And the big question: what about unlicensed pot shops on Indian Reservations?

What is the CSU?



B.C.'s Community Safety Unit is a [British Columbia](#) law enforcement agency. Established in 2018 and operational by 2019, it is part of the provincial government's efforts to shut down [illegal cannabis](#) shops.

The CSU operates under the authority of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. The CSU has the power to issue fines, seize products, and revoke licenses of retailers found to be violating provincial laws and regulations.

In addition to its enforcement role, the CSU also provides information and outreach to promote compliance with the laws and regulations related to [cannabis](#) sales and distribution.

B.C.'s Community Safety Unit: Changes to their Mandate

In November 2022, the B.C. provincial government amended the *Cannabis Control and Licensing Act*. The aim was to give the CSU more power to act against unlicensed online cannabis sales.

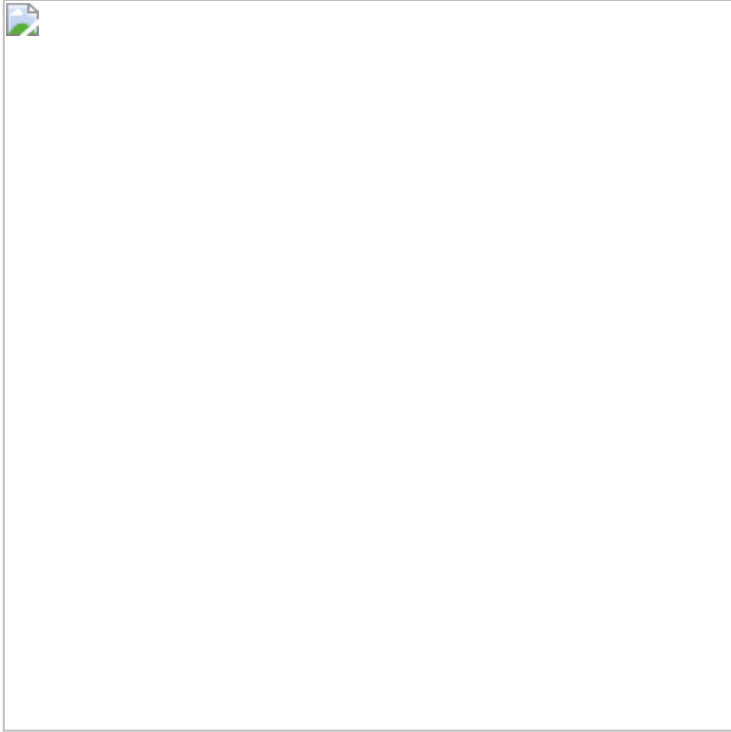
The amendments also aim to improve coordination and information sharing between government agencies. Namely, the Civil Forfeiture Office and the Investigations Unit of the Ministry of Finance, which are responsible for illegal [tobacco](#) enforcement.



In an email to CLN, the media liaison detailed how successful B.C.'s Community Safety Unit has been. As of February 2023,

- The CSU has made 320 visits to unlicensed retailers for educational purposes, information on how to comply with legislation and the role of the CSU.
- 92 unlicensed retailers had follow-up enforcement action when they continued to operate without a license after initial “education” visits.
- The CSU has seized approximately \$37 million in cannabis from the underground market.
- 189 unlicensed retailers have either closed or stopped selling cannabis due to CSU's actions.
- The CSU has issued 11 Administrative Monetary Penalties totalling approximately \$4.2 million, with roughly \$1.45 million of these penalties collected.
- The CSU has investigated 1205 illicit cannabis websites and disrupted 750 of them.

What about unlicensed pot shops on Indian Reservations?



Many Indigenous regions of Canada, legally called Indian Reservations, have been flaunting the rules regarding cannabis. For the most part, CSU hasn't prioritized these shops.

That provoked a [lawsuit](#) from legal [cannabis retailers](#) at a competitive disadvantage. While unlicensed shops on Indigenous land are in free markets, B.C.'s unnecessary regulatory bureaucracy handicaps legal cannabis retailers.

Last year, B.C.'s Minister of Public Safety, Mike Farnworth, [said](#): "Undertaking enforcement action on First Nations lands without the support of community leadership will likely lead to issues being litigated and strain relationships with First Nations communities. Even more, this approach is unlikely to achieve compliance and Indigenous participation in the legal [cannabis industry](#)."

But since then, B.C.'s Community Safety Unit has raided Indian Reservations without First Nations support. Last October, the CSU raided a cannabis shop on Osoyoos Indian Band lands.

Chief Clarence Louie, the long-standing Chief of OIB, said in a [statement](#):

Osoyoos Indian Band takes its responsibility to ensure public safety in our community very seriously. But we also take seriously our sovereignty and jurisdiction over our lands. The CSU's conduct in entering our lands without our consent after expressly advising us that they would not do so is unacceptable and undermines our efforts to work collaboratively with the provincial government. In this era of reconciliation, this is clearly not the way to build mutual trust and respect. These outdated, heavy handed government tactics of ignoring our governance role on our lands have no place in this era. Both the Prime Minister and Premier of B.C. have committed to Nation-to-Nation relationships with First Nations based on respect, but it is the opposite of respect for the Province to impose its authority on our reserves.

In response, the CSU said:

We're unable to comment on any specific enforcement actions that the CSU will or will not undertake in response to specific cases or situations. CSU is aware of operators throughout the province and encourages everyone to obtain a provincial licence to participate in B.C.'s legal [cannabis industry](#). [Unlicensed cannabis](#) operators can expect CSU to explain the risks of remaining outside of the legal regime, the benefits of licensing, and procedures to obtain a provincial license.

It's worth noting that the OIB self-government had licensed this cannabis shop according to their own [standards](#) and [best practices](#).

Footnote(s)

<https://www.castanet.net/news/Vernon/358404/Legal-cannabis-retailers-frustrated-by-minister-s-letter-confirming-province-not-taking-action-against-illicit-operators-on-reserves>

https://www.sylx.org/osoyoos-indian-band-reacts-to-community-safety-unit-raid-of-local-business/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=osoyoos-indian-band-reacts-to-community-safety-unit-raid-of-local-business