

The Sacramento Bee  
TUESDAY  
April 20, 1999

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## Weeding out the '420' code

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**I**t's 4/20 - do you know where your marijuana euphemisms are? Actually, one of the biggest is in the previous sentence.

In the hazy world of weed, the most blazing buzzword around these days is "420" - the number, the time and the date. It has come to mean everything from the act of smoking and the stuff that's smoked to optimum smoking time.

And on the cannabis-lovers' calendar, there is no date more significant than today's.

"It's well on its way to becoming a hippie holiday," says Steven Hager, the editor of High Times magazine.

Have a nice daze, indeed.

Actually, in case you haven't noticed through all the smoke, the dope-y digits "420" are beginning to appear everywhere.

They're on T-shirts, hats and bumper stickers, in rap and rock lyrics, and also on the big screen: In Quentin Tarantino's Hollywood hit, "Pulp Fiction," the clocks were all set to 4:20.

Some companies have even incorporated the numbers into their names, such as Sacramento's 420 Music and New York's 420 Tours.

"It's become a code people use to identify with each other and talk to each other without letting outsiders know what's going on," says Hager. "Ninety-nine percent of the people outside of stoner culture have no idea what 420 means; but 99.9 percent of the people inside the culture, they know.

"It's become a very powerful symbol."

Hager uses "420" as part of his e-mail address and also schedules many of his interviews and meetings at 4:20 - which, he says, "is the time of day when I go into a different mode; I don't smoke pot before 4:20."

Some hemp-heads have been known to break their watches so they're permanently set at 4:20. And there's a saying making the rounds: "It's always 4:20 somewhere."

But it's not always 4/20.

So to celebrate the "hippie holiday," several events are planned around the region today.

San Francisco's Maritime Hall, for instance, will become Marijuana Hall when it hosts the music-oriented 4-20 Hemp Festival.

Meanwhile, Hemp Rally '99 will take place on the south steps of the Capitol. Featuring various speeches plus politically minded music by the likes of

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## '420': Traced to 'Waldos' high school group in 1971

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4/20 Ray, it's scheduled to take place from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. - thus giving participants plenty of time to get home for the high-holy time of 4:20. (In an e-mail, organizers asked rally participants to leave their "medicine" at home, noting that authorities will be watching.)

And then, there's whatever you want to call the annual, underground and, obviously, illicit 4:20-on-4/20 smoke-out that takes place atop majestic Mount Tamalpais in Marin County.

"That's really the biggest 4/20 event," Hager says.

Not that the authorities will be out in force or anything. "I don't know anything about it," says Sgt. Dan Gallagher of the Marin County Sheriff's Department.

Mount Tam is a fitting location, given that the term 420 apparently got its start in nearby San Rafael.

Though it is believed that 420 is either po-

lice code for pot-smoking in progress or the number of compounds in tetrahydrocannabinol (also known as THC, the stuff in marijuana that gets users high), it's neither, police officers and scientists say.

Instead, it's simply the time of day a group of San Rafael High School students known as "The Waldos" set as their after-school marijuana meeting time back in 1971.

This according to Steve "Waldo," who says he's willing to take a lie-detector test to prove he and his friends created the number that is now No. 1 in cannabis culture.

"We've never made a penny off it, and we don't plan to," says Steve, who now runs a reputable financial business in San Francisco and, thus, did not want his last name used. "We're just proud of the legacy we began.

"It's amazing how 420 is all over the place now. I can't tell you the amount of times I'm traveling somewhere, and I'll sit down on a bench and see '420' carved into it. I kind of crack up."

Once the Waldos graduated from San Rafael High School in the early '70s, 420 remained a Marin County term until around 1982, when it began spreading through the sprawling Grateful Dead community. It has since moved outside of marijuana circles - which, High Times editor Hager says, isn't necessarily a good thing.

"Sooner than later," he says, "the cops are going to catch onto it."

(Says Sacramento police spokeswoman Michele Quattrin: "This is the first time I've heard of it.")

In any case, the Waldos are just happy High Times gave them their dope-term-coining due, featuring the group of marijuana merrymakers in a story late last year.

"When they ran the story, I said we'd get 15 minutes of fame," Steve "Waldo" says. "But considering the memories of pot smokers, we'll probably be forgotten after just 15 minutes."