

Crime Pot eradication effort to be stepped up

SANTA CRUZ — Despite a slight drop in the amount of growing marijuana seized by sheriff's narcotics agents this year, the Sheriff's Department says it is continuing its pot eradication effort.

Sheriff Al Noren commented today that agents are also trying to expand their battle against hard drugs.

According to statistics released this week, sheriff's narcotics agents seized \$11 million in growing marijuana last year. The figure showed a slight drop from 1981, when agents seized some \$11.3 million worth of the illegal weed.

Agents also seized \$1 million worth of cocaine in 1982 — a huge increase over the \$24,935 in cocaine a year before.

Noren said today the increase was due to the "more and more prevalent use of the drug." He said his office will be cracking down on sales of hard drugs this year.

At the same time, Lt. Phil Kirkland, the

leader of the marijuana eradication effort, said he hopes to step up enforcement of the Sinsemilla Eradication Program. (Sinsemilla is the Spanish term for "without seed.")

But he says he'll have to do it without any increase in the budget set aside for drug enforcement.

He said this year's marijuana haul represents about 20 percent of what is actually grown in Santa Cruz County.

Last year, some of the largest greenhouses in the state were found in Santa Cruz County, according to Kirkland.

In several cases, agents found hundreds of 15-foot tall marijuana plants growing in greenhouses.

Kirkland said he found more greenhouse operations last year than in previous years, indicating that growers are taking stronger steps to hide their illegal activity.

Kirkland said the value of the marijuana

was based on an average of one pound of marijuana per plant. Also, prices varied according to the plant sub-species that was found growing. Most plants were in the \$2,000 to \$2,5000 range.

The sheriff's statistics also showed that more heroin was seized in 1982 than the year before. Agents confiscated \$44,825 last year; the year before they seized \$13,850.

LSD seizures were down last year — with \$1,314 being taken in 1982 as compared with \$2,524 the year before.

The net total between the two years was considerably different, with 1982 much lower than 1981. But the big factor in the disparity was the seizure in 1981 of \$138.2 million worth of PCP-related drugs at one Santa Cruz mountain home.

Excluding that single seizure, 1982 saw a net total of \$12 million in drugs, while 1981 saw \$14 million taken in.