

# Lompico man arrested when firefighters find honey oil lab during fire

By Calvin Men

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LOMPICO >> A 45-year-old Lompico man was arrested Friday after firefighters found an illegal hash oil lab while responding to a fire at the man's home in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Nathan Quinn Johnson, who lives on 10575 Visitar St. in Lompico not far from the Quail Hollow Ranch County Park, was arrested on suspicion of manufacturing butane honey oil out of a shed at his home, Santa Cruz County sheriff's Lt. Kelly Kent said.

"He had a butane honey oil lab up there and he had illegal wiring and it caught fire to a shed," Kent said.

The man's adult son was home during the fire but Kent said the son did not know about the operation.

Honey oil, a stronger and more condensed form of marijuana, is manufactured using butane gas to extract oils from the plant.

About 5:10 a.m., one of Johnson's neighbors looked over a fence and saw what he thought was a vegetation fire, according to emergency dispatches. Zayante Fire Protection District responded to the call as a wildland fire. The residence is located near the top of a heavily wooded ridge. After they arrived and extinguished the small fire, they discovered the lab and notified the sheriff's Marijuana Compliance Team, Kent said.

The neighbor also heard several loud explosions during the fire. Kent said the explosions came from butane cans exploding in the fire.

Though there were no serious injuries, Kent said the hair on Johnson's eyebrows and arms were singed off.

Members of the Marijuana Compliance Team, formed earlier in the year to target mass marijuana growers who operate in the rural parts of the county, hauled PVC pipes and glass trays from the Lompico home Friday morning.

The arrest isn't novel for the county as authorities responded to a handful of illegal hash oil labs in recent years, all in Santa Cruz. A hash oil lab explosion on the 700 block of Third Street in September 2013 severely injured three men. In October 2013, a man making hash oil lit a cigarette, causing an explosion and suffering burns on more than 40 percent of his body.

In April, Santa Cruz police arrested a man and a woman after they found a drug lab while responding to a domestic violence report on the 200 block of Linden Street.

Sheriff's Sgt. Stefan Fish said he hadn't heard of the drug two years ago.

"Personally, from my experience, I would say that they're an emerging trend," he said. "I know that it's an emerging trend. We've had more than a handful of explosions with injuries."

Law makers have taken note of the proliferation of the drug and drug labs used to produce them. Thursday, the state Senate unanimously voted to send a bill to Gov. Jerry Brown that would make producing butane hash oil in a residential neighborhood an aggravated felony. Senate Bill 212 aims to address the increase in the number of hash oil and methamphetamine labs in residential neighborhoods in recent years.

Using chemicals to manufacture hash oil carries could mean up to seven years in jail and a \$50,000 fine, according to the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws Foundation, a nonprofit foundation that aims to inform the public about marijuana laws. Those who produce the drug through other means face up to three years in jail and an \$500 fine. Possession carries up to one year in jail and a \$500 fine.

Johnson was to be booked into Santa Cruz County Jail. He is being held in lieu of \$50,000.