

Nebraska deals with marijuana influx from Colorado

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HASTINGS, Neb. (AP) — Law enforcement officials in small Nebraska communities near the Colorado border are struggling to keep up with the amount of marijuana crossing the state line as drug arrests climb and county budgets are strained.

In Sidney, Nebraska, a small city of less than 7,000 people located 10 miles from the Colorado border, officers made the same number of marijuana arrests in the first five months of this year as all of last year, Police Chief B.J. Wilkinson said. Five of every 10 traffic stops results in a marijuana arrest, he told KHAS-TV in Hastings, Nebraska (<http://bit.ly/1sCSASM>).

The department ran through their overtime budget within six months, most of it to pay officers overtime to go to court for prosecutions.

Authorities are asking for state lawmakers to enforce stricter penalties.

"You know if you can smoke marijuana and walk out of court with \$120 fine and nothing else that may not be as much of an impact as if you walk out of court with a \$1,200 dollar fine," Wilkinson said.

He said the strain on resources "is deteriorating a quality of life here if we don't do something."

Deule County Sheriff Adam Hayward complains the county is getting so many felony drug cases stemming from Colorado marijuana that it is draining resources to house those arrested in the jail and to pay defense attorneys.

Cheyenne County made 60 marijuana arrests last year, up from 45 in 2010 and just 15 in 2009.

"It has affected on the budget side just because on the jail side we've had an increase of people," Sheriff John Jensen said.

Those operating marijuana businesses said they frequently get questions about what happens if they travel into a state in which it remains illegal.

"I would say that once a day somebody's like 'so what do you think about me traveling with this?' And our point is, hey, if you're going to Denver do whatever you want but if you're leaving the state throw it away don't leave with it," said Mike Kollartis, owner of Sedgwick Alternative Relief, a marijuana dispensary located in Sedgwick, Colorado, less than an hour drive from Cheyenne and Deule County.

