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## Cops built pot case for a year before El Dorado raids

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For more than a year, authorities followed the suspects' cars and conducted surveillance outside their homes. Agents pulled them over for traffic violations, dug through their trash and studied their property records.

The investigation by federal and local law enforcement agents culminated Wednesday in federal court, where a criminal complaint was filed against five suspects in a high-end pot-growing case.

The five defendants appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Gregory G. Hollows and were assisted by a Cantonese interpreter.

They were arrested Tuesday during a series of raids of expensive homes in El Dorado Hills, Placerville and elsewhere that resulted in the seizure of more than 1,500 marijuana plants and evidence of a sophisticated indoor pot-growing operation, authorities said.

The case began in August 2007, when Placer County sheriff's officials found 1,153 marijuana plants at a Foresthill home. Agents pored over property records and found ties between the owner of that home and two others in Auburn, court documents state.

That led Auburn police to talk to two area residents who were suspicious the homes might be fronts for marijuana growing. They told authorities they had seen people hauling in lumber, soil and plastic pipes, the documents state.

In ensuing months, detectives pulled over suspect vehicles for traffic and mechanical violations and linked more homes to the alleged scheme through property records.

At one point, officers pulled one of the suspects over for failing to use a turn signal and a deputy later reported "he smelled a strong odor of processed marijuana."

The five defendants were appointed lawyers Wednesday and one, Tony Quy Le, 50, was ordered released on bail if he could arrange to put up his Lincoln home as collateral. The house is in his father's name and it was unclear whether there is \$100,000 equity.

Lawyers for Hung The Le, 45, and Cuong The Le, 39, asked that bail hearings be set for their clients on Monday.

Minh Vihn Le, 31, was granted a bail hearing on Tuesday. Tien The Le, 41, was ordered held without bail.

A sixth suspect arrested Tuesday was not charged in the complaint.

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