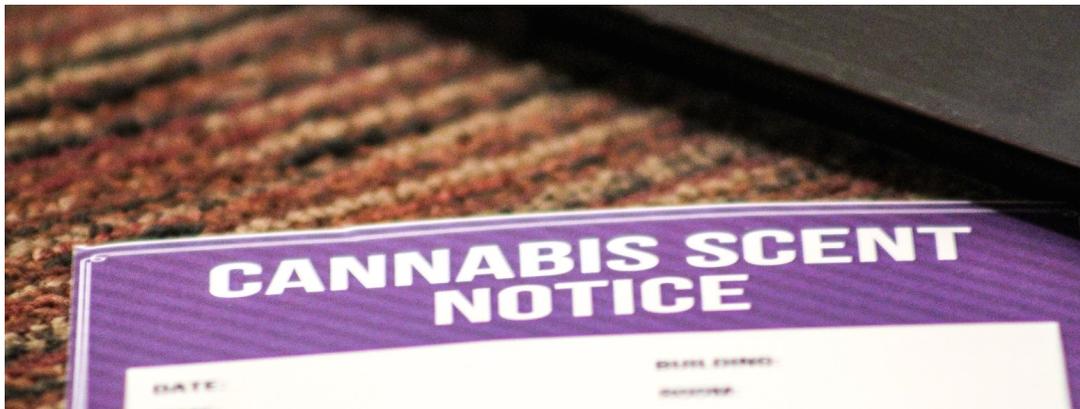


New procedure to deal with cannabis on-campus



Anissa Gardizy  • October 18, 2018



 Resident Assistants leave Cannabis Scent notices under dorm room doors after pinpointing the smell of marijuana on a residence hall floor. Anissa Gardizy / Beacon Staff

The Office of Community Standards and Student Conduct updated the way Resident Assistants handle incidents involving the smell of cannabis in room(s) by adding a Cannabis Scent Notice to standard procedure.

Last year's approach entailed RAs knocking on doors when they smelled cannabis and filing an incident report. The Cannabis Scent Notices aim to increase the effectiveness of tracking, addressing, and communicating issues of marijuana on campus, according to Assistant Director for the Office of Community Standards and Student Conduct Melissa Woolsey.

The notices are small purple cards that say "Cannabis Scent Notice" on the front. The back of the card features an explanation of what the

notice means and a QR code that links to Emerson's policy for alcohol and other drugs. The school still requires RAs to file an incident report each time they post a scent notice, but it will take three notices to warrant a conduct hearing.

Woolsey and Assistant Dean of Campus Life Elizabeth Ching-Bush introduced the new procedure after seeing the college's peer institutions use scent notices. Hired in the spring, Woolsey and Ching-Bush immediately began working on different ways to best handle cannabis-related incidents in residence halls.

"We spent a lot of time trying to understand what the culture was like and what students' views on cannabis and marijuana were like," Woolsey said. "We wanted to make sure that our students were more informed about what was reported and what wasn't reported."

In previous years, if an RA smelled cannabis, they knocked on a door if they could pinpoint the smell to a certain room. Sometimes, residents opened the door upon hearing the knock, but RAs often faced empty suites and situations where residents failed to open their door.

Junior Rachel Levin, a Resident Assistant, explained RAs still file an incident report when residents do not open their door. The incident reports also include whether or not RAs heard shuffling inside the room.

"It did happen a few times where someone just wouldn't answer, and you could clearly tell that they were in there," Levin said. "Then it is unfair as a resident to have an incident report written about you and not have verbal confirmation that it happened, so I like the scent notices this year."

When the school contacted the students about the incident, some never

knew it occurred in the first place. Even if students opened the door, RAs possessed no formal way of informing the entire room or suite. Woolsey said the notices let those potentially impacted by the smell know there is someone monitoring it.

In addition to informing the whole room or suite, the Cannabis Scent Notices also provide a better way to track and address drug violations. The fact that it takes three notices before a conduct hearing raises the chances of accurately identifying and addressing an issue, according to Woolsey.

“Last year we had community members who were really frustrated consistently about smells and people using around them,” Woolsey said. “However, there were no reports that we could follow up on to adjudicate or investigate it. This is a way to have increased reporting and increased knowledge.”

Sophomore Nola Elliffe, the Student Government Association Health and Wellness Commissioner, said the Cannabis Scent Notices mark a step in the right direction as the college continues to enforce rules that differ from the Massachusetts law in regards to cannabis use. She hopes RAs continue to use their best judgment when handling cannabis scent incidents.

“I really hope they are taking into consideration that there are many ways they could be smelling [marijuana],” Elliffe said.

So far, no room or suite has received three notices, according to Woolsey.

“Right now we haven’t seen any trends, which I think is a positive thing,” Woolsey said. “Students who are receiving them understand the policy after they read it and hopefully discontinue the behavior.”

Shafaq Patel, Kyle Labe, and Riane Roldan did not edit this article due to a conflict of interest.



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