

Now that the two states that just legalized marijuana sent their football teams to the Superbowl this year, it's clear that the stars are aligning for legalizing marijuana nationwide. Sure, legalizing marijuana makes [fiscal](#), [moral](#), and [practical](#) sense, but what about the benefits to the environment? Well, it turns out that even the fight against climate change could potentially be enhanced by making cannabis — and the grow operations that produce it — legal.

It starts with the grow sites. Regular Legal Planet readers may recall co-blogger Rick Frank writing about the [local hazards](#) and [pollution caused](#) by illegal grow operations on public lands. But there's another, potentially broader environmental issue at stake with legalizing and mainstreaming grow operations: enabling the improved collection of energy data to help target energy conservation and efficiency programs.

Energy data are critical to the fight against climate change and other harmful forms of air pollution. Policy makers, especially here in California (as [represented by Ken Alex](#), Legal Planet guest blogger and senior advisor to Governor Jerry Brown), would like to get a better sense of where the most energy is being used. If they could access energy data by neighborhoods, industry, and time of use, among other categories, policy makers could target the most inefficient customers with incentives and rates to become more efficient. Reducing this electricity usage would have major benefits in terms of reducing air pollution (including greenhouse gas emissions) from power plants and saving ratepayers money from the avoided construction of new plants. Not to mention that the customers themselves would benefit from paying for less electricity.

So what is standing in the way of giving policy makers access to the vital data? Privacy concerns. Even though the energy data are anonymized and aggregated, a [vocal segment](#) of ratepayers doesn't like even the remote possibility that the government could use these data to know when you're home, when you leave for work, or how your business operates.

Overall, most people have little to hide when it comes to electricity usage. But indoor marijuana growers sure do, and they are quietly constituting a major force in [opposition to greater disclosure of energy data](#). And they have reason for concern. In [documented cases](#), police have issued subpoenas for electricity data to bust pot growers. This is not a small industry either: a [2012 study](#) by Evan Mills of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (the Lab was not involved in his work) indicated that these grow operations could be responsible for up to 2% of nationwide household electricity usage, at a total cost of \$6 billion (in fact, the growers themselves may be our first target for implementing improved efficiency measures, given their potentially wasteful, unregulated ways).

So it's not a stretch to think that legalizing marijuana nationwide, and allowing commercial grow operations to proceed in a regulated fashion, could have the additional benefit of defusing some of the major privacy objections to releasing environmentally beneficial energy data. Of course, the privacy objections aren't just limited to marijuana growers, and even with legalization, some residential growers may still want or need to remain anonymous. But sensible marijuana policies could make a major difference in alleviating privacy concerns, unlocking the data that can lead to sound and strategic energy efficiency programs.

Sounds like a result everyone should be high on.