80-Ton Dope Haul Burned

LAFAYETTE (AP) — About 80 tons of confiscated, high-grade marijuana — thought to be the biggest seizure in history — went up in smoke Saturday.

But authorities said even as the Colombian Gold turned to ashes in the sugar mill incinerators of Iberia Parish, more of the illicit weed was enroute to the remote marshes and bayous of coastal Louisiana.

One law enforcement official believes that for every drug bust, nine other dope smuggling operations go undetected.

“We feel in law enforcement, because of the rules and regulations we have to abide by and the bad guys don’t, we’re fortunate if we get 10 percent of what’s moving on the water,” said state police Capt. Jerry Quebedeaux.

“We’ve had quite a bit of activity in Louisiana the past couple of years,” he said.

The big bust came last Wednesday, when the law swooped down on a barge in the Intracoastal Canal near Bayou Salle. The 100-foot by 30-foot barge was loaded to the gunwales with bales of marijuana.

Four people from Alabama and Florida were arrested on federal charges of possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, and each was held in lieu of $1.5 million bond.

Quebedeaux estimated that the marijuana would sell for $400 a pound in Louisiana and $700 a pound in New York.

That works out to a wholesale value of $64 million in Louisiana and $112 million on the East Coast.

Quebedeaux said the drug barge was not very well disguised. It was said to be a sandblasting rig but it had no sand.

“That’s kind of like a river with no water,” he said. “It sorta makes it suspect.”