

Local heroin trade has Columbus ties

MANSFIELD -- A heroin pipeline runs from Columbus to Richland County.

METRICH Enforcement Unit Commander Lt. Dino Sgambellone estimates 90 percent of the local heroin supply comes from the state capital.

"Our heroin problem is a direct result of individuals obtaining the drug from Columbus," Sgambellone said.

The heroin connection has led to a partnership with Columbus Narcotics, which has more manpower and resources than the 10-county regional task force. Joint investigations have resulted in the confiscation of 150 grams of heroin -- with a street value of more than \$100,000 -- destined for Richland and surrounding counties.

"We are seeing more heroin in Columbus than any of the other drugs," said Sgt. Bill Mingus of Columbus Narcotics.

The reasons extend beyond Ohio.

"Heroin is easier for the traffickers to get through," Mingus said. "In source countries for cocaine, it may be little tougher to get across the borders."

Sgambellone said there's been a dramatic local increase in the use and trafficking of heroin.

"Along with that, we've seen an increase in diverted pharmaceutical drugs," the lieutenant said. "We're seeing people follow that same path from abuse of pharmaceuticals to heroin. For the addict, it (heroin) becomes easier to get."

Sgambellone said local residents who go to Columbus for heroin often sell what they don't use. He said a balloon of heroin that goes for \$10 in Columbus sells here for \$40.

"From an interdiction standpoint, it requires different strategies from law enforcement," Sgambellone said. "With crack cocaine, you may have an individual running a distribution network, and he might have three or four houses in the city he's selling crack from. You know where it's being sold."

"Most of the time, you know who's selling it. It's easier to interrupt the distribution because it's more localized."

Heroin is another story.

"With heroin, the mid- and upper-level dealers are in Columbus," Sgambellone said. "(Locally) it's principally users that are selling what's left over from their trip in order to re-up. It's an endless cycle."



Heroin wrapped in foil and raw heroin that had yet to be packaged.

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