

## Richland County: Long effort brings drug results

More than 28 years after Richland County law enforcement started an organized drug task force, the county is sending more drug dealers to prison per capita than most other counties.

Richland County ranked 28th in the state for drug dealers sent to prison per 10,000 residents between 2009 and 2013. Of the neighboring counties, only Marion and Huron counties sent more to prison for their sizes, according to Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction records. The prison system counted people whose most serious offense was drug trafficking.

Richland County law enforcement started coordinating on drug cases in early 1986, forming a group called the METRICH Enforcement Unit after Metro-Richland County. More than 28 years later, METRICH includes nine counties and city police in Knox County — the most of any task force in Ohio.

Task force commander Ken Coontz remains in Richland County, which has at least double the population of all other task force counties.

The benefits of coordinating with multiple counties are better communication about drug problems and shared resources, such as money to buy drugs and equipment to search residences, Coontz said.

The challenge can be making sure each county gets an appropriately sized piece of the pie, said Marion police Lt. Chris Adkins, a METRICH member.

Richland County is working to make the most of its part. Between 2012 and 2013, more than one-third of the 134 drug trafficking cases indicted in Richland County ended in incarceration, according to court records. Sentences ranged from six months to 14 years in prison.

Another 57 cases or 42.5 percent of the total indictments ended in probation. Of the remaining indictments, 35 were dismissed and seven are awaiting resolution, according to court records.

Some dismissed cases were charged again at a later time while others were part of a deal. Each case has unique circumstances, Coontz said.

“There’s a multitude of reasons of why that occurred,” he said.

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