

Fentanyl changes everything' METRICH speaker says

Drug is cheap, powerful, and often kills customers

"Fentanyl changes everything," Michael Gray, the CEO of Actus Analytical Inc., said Tuesday at the Ohio State Reformatory.

That's because fentanyl is "easier to make than other opioids, easier to ship, smuggle than other opioids, significantly more profitable and far more potent than other opioids," Gray said as he gave a slide show presentation.

"There is one downside: It kills customers.

"Used to get 8 years/more than 10,000 doses from a customer before death. Now, maybe three or four doses. Amanda bought just 12 to 13 doses in her life. Amanda was likely killed intentionally, why?" Gray said before a packed central guard room in the prison-turned-museum off Ohio 545.

Gray's daughter, Amanda Gray, 24, was killed by a poisoning of straight fentanyl on Jan. 11, 2018. The Gray family battled with Amanda's acute mental illness throughout her life and substance abuse in the two years before she died, the father told local, state and federal members of law enforcement who gathered with community leaders in the room.

Gray and his wife Nancy founded The Actus Foundation, which advocates for solutions to treating the entirety of the overdose epidemic problem in America. The foundation also advocates for the mentally ill.

Cocaine and heroin still remain prevalent

Tony Tambasco, director of the Mansfield Police Department Crime Lab, said cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines and fentanyl continue to dominate the 10-county region in which the METRICH drug task force is active.

In his 37 years on the job, Tambasco said he is now seeing seven to nine different components in some drug samples he tests.

"There's even a new group called Thiambutens showing up as a major component and it's morphine-like," Tambasco said. "It's showing up as a major component in the drug samples we're getting."

Tambasco said 971 drug samples were tested in the Mansfield police crime lab.

In the last 20 years, statistics show that cocaine has not gone away, nor has heroin.

"You look at heroin, wow, you might think heroin is going down. Unfortunately it's not," he said.

This year carfentanil — a synthetic opioid 100 times more potent than fentanyl — returned, he said. "It went away for about 18 months."

"We have to get out in the community to address education"

The annual meeting also included comments from Mansfield police Chief Keith Porch and Assistant police Chief Joe Petrycki.

Petrycki highlighted drugs, cash and firearms that were confiscated in various counties in the past year. In Richland County, members of METRICH were able to collaborate on a long-term investigation with the FBI to get 43 people federally indicted and 36 indicted on state charges.

Porch said METRICH is a success because of the FBI, Secret Service, DEA, U.S. Marshals, the prosecutor's offices, the sheriff's offices and more.

"To the state and federal agencies who are here, thank you very much," he said. METRICH has collaborated since 1986.

He said METRICH is not only an enforcement unit but an educational unit.

"We have to get out in the community to address education and demand reduction, educate the community of the issues. If we don't do it, who will?" Porch said.

He said he is extremely proud of the efforts that investigators have accomplished throughout the 10 counties because of the goals and objectives set for them

Originally published in the News Journal on September 11, 2019.