

Crime lab director: Mansfield overdoses down in 2018; fatalities on rise

Even though overdoses are down considerably in Mansfield in 2018, there could be more fatalities than last year.

Tony Tambasco, crime lab director for the Mansfield Police Department, delivered the sobering news at the recent annual METRICH Enforcement Unit luncheon at the Ontario Event Center.

According to city statistics, there were 460 overdoses last year and 23 deaths. So far in 2018, there already have been 19 fatal overdoses of the 166 total.

As is the case in many other communities, fentanyl is of primary concern because of its potency.

"We treat everything like it's fentanyl now," Tambasco said.

Of the 2018 samples to date, 11 percent have contained fentanyl. Heroin has made up only 6 percent of the samples to come through the crime lab this year.

Other drugs include marijuana, 28 percent; cocaine, 14 percent; and methamphetamine, 13 percent.

Last month, the crime lab received a sample of black tar fentanyl.

"It's only the second time we've seen it," Tambasco said.

A number of issues have led to increased wait time in crime labs. Tambasco said a standard analysis used to take only 10 minutes. The current timeline is 30 to 40 minutes.

Also at the luncheon, Assistant Chief Keith Porch reviewed some of the numbers for METRICH, a 10-county decentralized task force that focuses on drugs and weapons.

METRICH set a goal of confiscating 2,313 grams of heroin in 2018. So far, authorities have removed 1,809.91 grams, or 78 percent of the goal.

Common Pleas Judge Brent Robinson filled in as the keynote speaker at the Sept. 18 luncheon.

Robinson spoke out against the controversial Issue 1, a proposed constitutional amendment designed to reduce the number of people in state prisons for nonviolent crimes like drug possession.

According to ballotpedia.org, the initiative would make the possession, obtainment and use of drugs no more than a misdemeanor, with sentences not exceeding probation for a first or second offense.

Issue 1 would not change the classification of fourth- or fifth-degree drug-related felonies, such as the sale, distribution or trafficking of drugs.

It also would allow individuals serving convictions higher than a misdemeanor for possession, obtainment and use of drugs to petition the court for re-sentencing.

Calling it a public safety issue that could affect the administration of justice, Robinson spoke out strongly against Issue 1.

"It will be devastating if it's passed," the judge said.

Robinson said special interest groups outside the state are behind Issue 1. He fears their goal is the legalization of all drugs.

He said if the issue passes, drug users will come to Ohio, followed by dealers.

"It's all economics," Robinson said.

The judge said Issue 1 would make it impossible to send fourth- and fifth-degree drug offenders to prison.

"Drug court won't exist anymore," Robinson said, adding the cases would go to municipal court.

He said the issue is not a political one and that law enforcement officers are mostly opposed to it.

Robinson closed by saying the people behind Issue 1 are seeking an "end-around," knowing it would not make it through the state Legislature.

"Tell everyone you know, vote no for goodness sake," Robinson said.

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