

## Marion County authorities seize nearly 1,000 grams of fentanyl in drug raids

Agents from the METRICH-MARMET Drug Task Force and other law enforcement agencies seized nearly 1,000 grams of fentanyl during a midweek raid, which was the culmination of what officials are calling "a major drug trafficking investigation."

Major Chris Adkins of the Marion Police Department and the METRICH-MARMET Drug Task Force said local law enforcement agents in concert with agents from the Cleveland and Cincinnati offices of the FBI executed search warrants at four locations on Wednesday in Marion and Morrow counties. He said the raids netted a total of 941 grams of suspected fentanyl, three firearms, and drug paraphernalia.



Agents arrested Christopher B. Payne Jr., age 24, Marion, who was charged with two counts of trafficking in a fentanyl-related compound, both first-degree felonies, when he appeared in Marion Municipal Court. Bond for Payne was set at \$5 million. He is being held at the Multi-County Correctional Center in Marion. He is scheduled to appear in municipal court for a preliminary hearing at 8:30 a.m. on March 24, according to online court records.

Adkins said agents executed search warrants at a residence in the 800 block of Adams Street in Marion, a residence in the 800 block of Central Drive in Marion, a residence in the 600 block of Pearl Street in Marion, and a residence in the 5000 block of Township Road 59 in Mount Gilead. Payne was arrested at the Pearl Street residence, Adkins said.

"This is an ongoing investigation," Adkins said. "This is a very significant seizure of fentanyl. On average, two milligrams of fentanyl can be lethal, so with the amount that we seized, it could kill approximately 470,000 people. We're losing a lot of people to fentanyl. In Marion County, we lose an average of 40 people a year to fentanyl. For a community our size, the number of deaths that we have from fentanyl is staggering."

According to the affidavit filed in support of the arrest warrant for Payne, he allegedly sold fentanyl to confidential informants on two occasions in December 2022 and January 2023. In the affidavit, Det. Stacy McCurry of the METRICH-MARMET Drug Task Force stated that on Dec. 28, 2022, Payne allegedly "sold fentanyl to a confidential informant, who was working with the METRICH-MARMET Drug Task Force. (Payne allegedly) supplied the fentanyl to the confidential informant for \$680. The suspected fentanyl that (Payne allegedly) sold was tested by the Mansfield Police Crime Lab and was found to be 49.64 grams of a substance containing fentanyl. This is enough fentanyl to kill nearly 25,000 people."

McCurry said the second incident occurred on Jan. 10, 2023, when Payne allegedly "sold fentanyl to a confidential informant, who was working with the METRICH-MARMET Drug Task Force. (Payne allegedly) supplied the fentanyl to the confidential informant for \$780. The suspected fentanyl that (Payne allegedly) sold was tested by the Mansfield Police Crime Lab and was found to be 26.74 grams of substance containing fentanyl. This is enough fentanyl to kill nearly 13,000 people."

Adkins said the Marion Police Department, Marion County Sheriff's Office, Morrow County Sheriff's Office, Wyandot County Sheriff's Office, Marion County Prosecutor's Office, and the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio were all involved in the investigation and subsequent raids on Wednesday.

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