

## **DRUG DEATH TOLL IN AREA HIGHEST SINCE ' 75**

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**Drug** -related **deaths in** the Detroit **area** last year soared to the **highest toll since** 1975, after falling from an epidemic- level peak **in** the 1970s.

The number of cocaine-linked **deaths in** the Detroit metropolitan **area** climbed, along with heroin-related **deaths** , according to city, county and federal officials.

**Since** 1982, the number of people **in** the tri-county Detroit **area** dying from cocaine use has increased eightfold, from five **in** 1982 to 41 **in** 1985, according to federal officials.

"There are more people out there using more dangerous forms of **drugs** , and the likelihood of dying is increased," said Richard Calkins of the state Office of Substance Abuse Services.

Although counts vary, because of different record-keeping methods or **areas** included, all of the measures show **drug deaths** have climbed steadily **in** the Detroit metropolitan **area since** 1980.

WAYNE COUNTY'S 217 **drug deaths in** 1985 marked a 28 percent increase over 1984. As of April 1986, there had been 76 **drug deaths** , which matches last year's total during the same period, according to the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office.

From a peak of 341 **drug** -related **deaths in** 1975 **in** Wayne County, the number fell to 73 by 1978, the Medical Examiner's reports show.

More than 90 percent of Wayne County's **drug deaths** last year occurred **in** Detroit, said Dr. Joseph Monforte of the Medical Examiner's Office.

Last year, the greatest number of victims **in** Detroit were single black men between 30 and 34 who had been laborers, said Detroit Health Department officials.

Law enforcement officials say the number of **drug deaths** also has increased **in** other cities with histories of **drug** abuse.

Officials say the deadly trend may be linked to addicts mixing heroin and alcohol, a steady source of narcotics, and greater purity of **drugs** , especially of cocaine.

**IN DETROIT**, the changing **drug** scene may be a factor **in** the increased **deaths** , and the rise **in** violence, said Inspector Joel Gilliam of the Police Department's narcotics section.

Cocaine and crack, its cheaper derivative, are no longer just for the rich, he said. Crack the size of a match head sells for \$10 to \$30 **in** the Detroit **area** , say law enforcement officials.

Some users are selling cocaine to get money and using heroin to get **high** , Gilliam explained.

"Now anybody with \$5,000 can go into the **drug** business," said Gilliam, adding that one cause of violence **in** the city could be squabbling over **drug** turf. He said the increase **in deaths** also might come from inexperienced dealers who mix **drugs** incorrectly.

Heroin alone caused 209 **deaths** last year **in** the Detroit metropolitan **area** , which takes **in** Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties, according to the National Institute of **Drug** Abuse.

The number put the **area** second to Los Angeles (365) and ahead of Washington (170), San Francisco (116) and Philadelphia (82) **in** heroin **deaths** , according to NIDA.

**Since** 1982, New York City has not reported its **drug deaths** to the federal government for a "lack of resources" **in** tabulating them, said Ann Blanken, a NIDA official **in** Washington.

AS OFFICIALS consider these **drug deaths** , they talk of the day when cocaine may replace heroin as the number one killer.

Robert DeFauw, special agent **in** charge of the Detroit office for the U.S. **Drug** Enforcement Agency, said: "You'll see cocaine nose out heroin as the leading cause of **death** with this surge **in** cocaine use. Last year, we were buying cocaine at 30 percent purity. This year it's all over 90 percent."

The number of cocaine **deaths in** the nation's 27 largest metropolitan **areas** has increased from 140 **in** 1981 to 629 last year, according to NIDA.

Federal researchers who have tracked **drug deaths since** the early 1980s talk of new nationwide epidemics **in** heroin and cocaine use, but admit they have not studied the trend **in** enough detail to fully explain the fatalities.

"The people who are dying are not first-time users. They are people with longtime histories," said Jim Ruttenbur, an epidemiologist with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control **in** Atlanta, who has completed one of the few studies, on **drug deaths in** Washington, D.C.

"The ones who are dying from heroin are people who drink and use heroin," he said. "The reason Washington has such a **high** number is that you've got the heroin available, and you've got a lot of poor users. They don't have the money, so they combine."

Dr. James Sall, director of Detroit's Bureau of Substance Abuse, thinks cocaine has increased the number of **drug deaths** , but he is not sure how much.

"We don't even know if these people (who died) have ever been into treatment," he said. "I figure we probably reach one out of every seven out there, if we are lucky, who are abusing."

"I get more and more ( **drug** abuse **death** ) reports and there were three more this morning . . . We definitely have to be concerned, but trying to get a handle and put our concerns into action is extremely difficult."

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Caption: Chart JOANNA CHARLES

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