

## **Fentanyl-laced heroin likely mixed by local dealers - But attempting to get a murder conviction would be a challenge, says drug enforcement agent.**

Detroit News, The (MI) - Friday, June 30, 2006

Author: The Detroit News ; Paul Egan

DETROIT -- The deadly combination of **heroin** and fentanyl that has killed more than 130 Metro Detroit drug users since September was probably **mixed** locally **by dealers** seeking to boost their profits, says the special agent in charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in Detroit.

"I strongly believe that it's getting **mixed** at the street level," Robert Corso said of the **heroin** - fentanyl combination in his first interview since the recent spike in overdose deaths was made public in May.

"It's a financial issue. They may have some crappy **heroin** , and they're trying to get more money for it."

Adding fentanyl -- a painkiller about 50 times more potent than morphine that is used as an anesthetic and for acute pain in some cancer patients -- gives diluted or impure **heroin** an added punch. However, a dose as small as a few grains of salt can be fatal, and those mixing it are not trained chemists or pharmacists.

The lethal concoction **likely** was **mixed by local dealers** , but getting a murder conviction in such a case would be a challenge, Corso said.

"It would have to have an aggressive prosecution," he said. "A big part of a murder prosecution is intent, and proving a guy on the street was mixing some drug intending to kill a particular person -- I don't know."

Officials have brought drug charges against three Detroit-area men believed to be connected to the **fentanyl-laced heroin** sales.

The DEA -- which places emphasis on cracking the highest levels of drug trafficking organizations, rather than street-level users -- first raised an alert about the tainted **heroin** in November, when it said its agents bought drugs in Detroit containing "potentially lethal" levels of fentanyl.

A broader alert was not issued to the public until May, when Wayne County officials tied a spike in overdose deaths to fentanyl.

Rather than being seen as a deadly threat, fentanyl is a selling point for many users, Corso said. In Chicago, the DEA issued a warning that a **heroin** -fentanyl mixture was being sold at a particular location, and "the next day users were lined up around the corner, trying to get that product," he said.

Caption: "We'll get to the bottom of it," says Robert Corso of the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Section: Metro

Page: 01B

Company Name: #keywords2#

Index Terms: DRUG TRAFFIC ; DEATHS

Dateline: DETROIT

Record Number: det24320798

Copyright (c) The Detroit News. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. by NewsBank, inc.