

HEROIN IS BACK ON THE STREETS \ IN DEADLY DOSAGES , POLICE SAY

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Friday, July 15, 1988

Author: BRIAN FLANIGAN AND DEBORAH KAPLAN , e Press Staff Writers

Heroin , **the** drug blamed for **the** 1970s gang warfare that first won Detroit its label as "Murder City," has resurfaced **on the streets** at alarming levels of purity, according to local law enforcement officials.

" **Heroin** had just about completely disappeared. . . . Now it's **back** ," said Cmdr. Warren Harris, head of **the** Detroit Police Department's narcotics division.

Although police and federal agencies still focus **on the** flood level of cocaine in southeast Michigan, they say increasingly large amounts of **heroin** are being seized.

In **the** first six months of this year, **the** Wayne County Sheriff's Department has seized almost 74 times more **heroin** than it confiscated in all of 1987 -- 44 pounds compared to 9.53 ounces, said Inspector Melvin Turner, in charge of special operations, which includes **the** sheriff's narcotics unit.

Federal studies over **the** last five years show that Detroit has retained a sizable population of **heroin** addicts, but law enforcement officials said little **heroin** was turned up in drug raids during **the** last two years.

" **Heroin** has started to really heat up here since **the** end of last year, especially in **the** last three or four months," said William Coonce, special agent in charge of **the** Detroit office of **the** federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

"Although 60 to 70 percent of our cases still are cocaine, we're starting to make more **heroin** cases. **The** sense we're getting **is** that **the** supply **is** here and they're waiting for **the** demand to pick up," Coonce said.

A similar trend **is** developing throughout **the** nation, he said.

"Nationally, it **is** **the** DEA's information that we're being flooded with **heroin** ," Coonce said. **The heroin is** coming from Asia and Mexico, according to **the** DEA.

Officials cited these other signs of **the heroin** resurgence:

* During **the** past four or five months, **heroin** confiscation has increased by 20 percent in Detroit drug raids where cocaine **is** found, Harris said.

* Vesta Svenson, a magistrate at 36th District Court in Detroit who routinely arraigns people **on** drug charges, noted an upswing in **the heroin** seizures cited in police investigators' reports filed with **the** court.

"In **the** last couple of months, all of those seizures seem to show a re-emergence of **heroin** ," she said. "For a long time it was cocaine, cocaine, cocaine."

* Recently, undercover State Police drug investigators, who had been working almost exclusively **on** cocaine cases, bought more than a pound of **heroin** in Macomb County.

"It was 93 percent pure," said Lt. Roger Bittell, **the** commander of **the** drug unit.

The police officials said **the** potentially lethal purity of **the** drug **on the street is** as worrisome as its resurgence.

"It's very, very scary," said Doug Wankel, **the** assistant special agent in charge of **the** DEA office in Detroit.

Historically, officials said, **heroin** sold **on the streets** of metropolitan Detroit -- in manila coin envelopes for \$10 to \$20 -- was no more than two percent pure.

Today, Harris said, **the street heroin** being confiscated in Detroit by his officers **is** averaging about 12 percent purity. Wankel said some DEA **street** buys are yielding even higher purity.

As part of a national monitoring program, DEA agents and informants periodically make **street** buys to help determine **the** availability and purity of various drugs, Wankel said.

He said several such **street heroin** purchases made recently in metropolitan Detroit showed purity levels of 9.3 percent, 11.1 percent, 13.7 percent, 25.3 percent, 29.7 percent and 71percent.

Noted Richard Calkins, evaluations chief for **the** state Office of Substance Abuse:

"When you get purity that high, it means there's going to be more overdoses" because users won't realize **the** strength of **the** drug or be able to tolerate it.

Purity levels that high mean something else to Wayne County's Turner.

" **The heroin** dealers are trying to get **back the** customers they lost to cocaine," he said. "They put out purity that high, sometimes they even give it away for a day or two, to get people hooked. Then what happens **is** they start dropping that purity level **back** down and start raking in **the** big bucks."

The possibility of huge profits **is** one of **the** various theories cited by law enforcement officials when asked why **heroin is** making a comeback.

Although bulk **heroin is** more expensive than a comparable amount of bulk cocaine, **heroin** potentially **is** much more lucrative.

"Usually, cocaine can only be cut (diluted) two or three times before it's sold, but even a small quantity of **heroin** is a gigantic quantity because it can be cut as much as 100 times," said Macomb County Prosecutor Carl Marlinga.

Wankel said some drug dealers may be driven to **heroin** by police crackdowns **on** cocaine. Others are going into **the heroin** business because they do not want to contend with **the** crowded, increasingly violent world of cocaine dealers, officials said.

Whatever **the** reasons, metropolitan Detroit's law enforcement community expects **the** battle against **heroin** to intensify in **the** coming months.

Calkins, who also **is** an analyst for **the** National Institute **on** Drug Abuse, said he expects "to see a continued resurgence of **heroin** use. These things tend to go in cycles and that can be seen all **the** way **back** to **the** 1800s. It's uppers, like cocaine, for awhile. Then it's downers, like **heroin** .

"It took a **back** seat to cocaine, but **heroin** use **is** increasing again. It's definitely **back** ."

HEROIN

Derived from poppy plants grown in Afghanistan, Mexico and parts of southeast Asia, **the** drug **heroin** was developed by **the** Bayer Co. of Germany in 1898 as a painkiller, cough suppressant and cure for diarrhea. It later was touted as a cure for morphine addiction but soon was discovered to be highly addictive itself. **Heroin** became a popular **street** drug in America during **the** early 1900s when legal restrictions were put **on** opium.

Edition: METRO FINAL CHASER

Section: NWS

Page: 1A;

Index Terms: HISTORY ; HEROIN; STATISTIC ; DETROIT ; INCREASE

Record Number: 8801310453

Copyright (c) 1988 Detroit Free Press