

Police worker guilty in drug theft - Detroit evidence room employee confesses to stealing cocaine for \$1.3M to buy properties

Detroit News, The (MI) - Friday, August 13, 2004

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DETROIT - A former evidence room employee for the Detroit Police Department confessed Thursday to stealing 100 kilograms of cocaine, selling it and using the proceeds to buy several properties in Detroit.

John Earl Cole Sr . pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute controlled substances and money laundering.

Under a plea agreement, he faces no more than 30 years in prison and will be liable to repay \$1.3 million - the amount he allegedly received for the drugs.

Cole , 52, said he took at least 220 pounds of cocaine between 1994 and 2000 - using a duffel bag. He said he kept the cocaine, with a street value of more than \$2 million, in his locker.

He then replaced some of the stolen cocaine with flour.

Cole said he sold the cocaine on the streets of Metro Detroit and used the proceeds to buy at least 17 Detroit properties, including a barbershop and apartment buildings.

Working with a Detroit police officer, Donald Hynes, **Cole** alleged, he would steal cocaine three or four times a year.

Hynes, who is under indictment awaiting trial, helped him "because he had the key to the evidence room and it would look suspicious if I went in alone," **Cole** told the court.

The precise amount stolen will never be known because of poor record keeping by Detroit Police.

The last theft occurred in 2000, when **Cole** removed 55 pounds of cocaine.

If the government believes **Cole** has provided substantial assistance, they will recommend a sentence of 15 years. **Cole** has already served nearly two years in custody awaiting trial.

The FBI began looking into **Cole** in March 2001, when Detroit police discovered that a sealed package of Gold Medal flour was in a box that had contained the drug.

To date, six others have pleaded guilty in the investigation.

They were **Cole** 's brother, David L. **Cole** Jr., 62, of Detroit; Anthony Lasenby, 35, of Detroit; Shirley Terry, a bank teller at Comerica Bank; Cora L. **Cole** -Robinson, **Cole** 's mother; Ide Mae Hall, **Cole** 's former mother-in-law; and Chontrice **Cole** , **Cole** 's daughter.

What's next in cocaine theft case

* **John Earl Cole Sr .** will be sentenced Nov. 16 by U.S. District Judge **John Corbett O'Meara**.

* He will have to testify against the remaining two co-defendants, former Detroit Police Officer Donald Hynes and Michigan State Police Lt. Ernest D. Myatt **Sr .**, if they go to trial.

Edition: One Dot

Section: Metro

Page: 01D

Index Terms: DETROIT ; POLICE-AS CRIMINALS ; DRUG TRAFFIC ; ROBBERY

Dateline: DETROIT

Record Number: det19543705

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