

## County drug deaths on the rise

### Drug unit officers speak at Wednesday forum

**By Darryl J. Enriquez**

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WAUKESHA – Nearly twice as many drug deaths occurred in Waukesha County last year as traffic fatalities, due to the growing taste among addicts for opiate-based heroin and pharmaceuticals, two top drug cops told an audience of about 90 at the County Courthouse on Wednesday morning.

In 2012, drug overdoses killed 52, according to Waukesha County Metro Drug Unit statistics.

The most alarming statistic was a number of countywide heroin deaths that more than tripled from 6 in 2011 to 21 last year, according to the Waukesha County Medical Examiner's Office.

An anti-drug coalition called Waukesha County Drug Free Communities is doing its part to fight the rising use of drugs, especially among school-age children. It hosted the forum on new drug trends in the county, presented by Capt. Frank McElderry, commander of the metro drug unit, and Chris Kohl, a unit detective.

The forum was attended by school personnel, counselors, public safety officials, health care workers, volunteers and Drug Free Communities members.

The drug unit was created in 1985 to combat rising drug sales and production. It is comprised of the Waukesha County Sheriff's Department and the Waukesha County District Attorney's Office, plus police agencies in Waukesha, Brookfield, New Berlin, Menomonee Falls, Hartland, Muskego and Pewaukee. The Wisconsin Air National Guard also is a member and provides electronic intelligence gathering.

#### **Heroin, derivatives increasingly popular**

The threat of drug use in Waukesha County is high because its young residents have money, the skills and the savvy to market illegal substances, McElderry said.

The latest trends in drug use are the increasing popularity of heroin, followed by OxyContin and oxycodone, two derivatives of heroin that come in pill form, he said.

According to state statistics, Waukesha County was the second highest in having the state Crime Laboratory in Madison analyze heroin samples with 85 cases in 2012. Milwaukee came in first with 91 cases. Winnebago County came in third with 42.

Drug-related deaths have climbed county-wide from 42 in 2010 to 47 in 2011 to 52 last year. Heroin deaths have sharply risen from five in 2010 to 6 the following year to 21 in 2012, the medical examiner's office reports. Deaths related to the use of other opiates have fluctuated during the past three years: 30 in 2010, 35 in 2011 and 23 last year.

#### **Internet facilitates growing marijuana**

Marijuana remains the most popular drug in Waukesha County. Its potency continues to rise, McElderry said.

Potent marijuana is available here because "little Bobby is now a botanist," McElderry said. "He can find out on the Internet how to grow high-grade marijuana."

On the horizon is the expected increase in the use of methamphetamine, a drug that keeps its users high for four days, compared to the six hours of a heroin high, Kohl said.

Losing popularity are cocaine and crack cocaine, Kohl said.

"Drugs are like fashion, they come and go," Kohl said. "Pharmaceuticals and heroin are big now."

What has changed in society is that kids are not afraid of drugs like many of their parents were, especially those in pill form.

"We're an overprescribed society," Kohl said.

A study done by the University of Michigan showed that in an average 12th grade classroom, 11 students regularly do drugs, he said.

Drug use is not affecting just kids. Kohl talked of a common occurrence in which injured workers are prescribed opiate-based painkillers and become addicted to them. Their prescription refills are then discontinued by their physicians.

Next, the pill user then turns to cheaper heroin obtained from the streets to satiate his or her habit, Kohl said.

More information can be found at [www.waukeshacounty.gov/dfc](http://www.waukeshacounty.gov/dfc).