

Trying to curb crack's availability

Continued from Page 1

crack epidemic into the suburbs. "I WOULD assume the possibility of its moving into Oakland County and Farmington Hills is very likely," Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer said. "We can see it coming into the suburbs. It really hasn't reached the suburbs as fast as it has Detroit. But by the first of the year, we anticipate that we will see a dramatic increase in crack — the use and sale of it."

Pat Monti, a Farmington Hills detective who recently completed a year of undercover work with NET, knows firsthand of cocaine's proliferation in the suburbs.

"There's a lot of coke in Oakland County. There's a lot of cocaine in Farmington Hills. There is in every suburb in the county. It's just a matter of time before you see your major dealers here," Monti said.

Though NET covers the spectrum of drugs — marijuana, heroin, prescription pills — cocaine and, to a lesser extent, crack have been demanding the attention of undercover officers in the past year.

Statistics speak for themselves.

Of the total 286 arrests NET officers made in 1985, 110 were specifically for delivery of cocaine. Two of the arrests were for delivery of more than 650 grams of cocaine, a charge that, upon conviction, carries a sentence of life imprisonment. Another four arrests were for cocaine possession.

NET (COCAINE) definitely is a problem. We come in contact with it often," Gibbard said.

Through August 1986, 19 arrests for cocaine possession or delivery were made. In 1985, 32 arrests for possession or delivery of cocaine were made, Dwyer said.

So arrests for possession or delivery of cocaine have been made in Farmington this year, Farmington Department of Public Safety Deputy Director Gary Goss said.

But Farmington and Farmington Hills police officials point to the number of breakings and enterings and larcenies as a sign of cocaine use. "It's difficult to determine if cocaine use is a problem. But we see the effects of the problem, breakings and enterings, larcenies. This is what users do to support their habits," Goss said.

Monti agreed. Within six months, Farmington Hills might experience an increase in breakings and enterings and other such crimes that could be linked to cocaine. In many cases,

property crimes — from which goods can be sold for cash — can be linked with the use of narcotics, Monti said.

TO FURTHER illustrate the cocaine and crack problem that's hit metropolitan Detroit, the Drug Enforcement Administration (a part of the U.S. Justice Department) in July instituted a telephone hotline (STOP COCAINE Dial: (313) NO CRACK) to receive information from the public to help enforce and stem the growing epidemic.

Since the hotline's inception, the DEA has received 140 complaints "demanding enforcement action in Oakland County," said Robert DeFauw, DEA special agent in charge.

"You do have considerable use in the outlying suburbs. It is more cocaine. But crack is increasing in popularity and to a degree is found in Oakland County," DeFauw said.

Cocaine has traditionally been associated with young, upper middle class professionals — those who can afford an expensive recreational drug. From the outset, crack has been tied to low-income urban residents, Monti said.

"It seems to be an urban phenomenon right now. It's a cheap high," he said. "Consider that 0.4 gram can be bought as a \$15 rock of crack."

Crack is the substance that's now drawing the media and public's attention now. But cocaine — in whatever form is popular at the moment — is the problem.

"I don't think there has ever been a drug that has been so readily accepted," Dwyer said. "The supply is way up. It's uncontrolled right now as far as production and supply go. It's like we are in a cocaine crisis right now. The federal government has failed to control the drug problem."

COCAINE'S GROWING popularity in large part is due to the recent decrease in its price.

In 1980, for example, an ounce of the white powder cost about \$2,800. Today, an ounce costs \$600. Crack, which looks like a small piece of rock candy, sells for \$5 to \$25, depending on the rock's size, said Dwyer, who formerly headed the Detroit Police Department's narcotics section.

"It (cocaine) is popular because it's available," said Gary Goss, of the Farmington Department of Public Safety. "Cocaine has always been there. It's always been expensive, though. Now it's going down in price."

With the proliferation of cocaine and crack, and the growing number



Farmington Hills detective Pat Monti identifies narcotics paraphernalia sold by a Farmington-area party store. The

paraphernalia is used to process and use crack, a smokable type of cocaine.

of those who buy and sell the drugs, law enforcement agencies are faced with a difficult task.

One problem stems from cocaine and crack being very easy to conceal. For example, one gram of cocaine is similar to the restaurant-sized packet of artificial sweetener. Unlike many other processed illegal drugs, crack can be made quite easily in any kitchen, Goss said.

Though Detroit may have well-known crack houses and places notorious for drug dealing, the suburban communities — and residents — are a bit different.

"Sure there are crack houses in Oakland County — maybe they are not as prevalent as in Detroit, though," Gibbard said.

AS WITH a crackdown on any drug, law enforcement officials try to reduce availability. That means concentrating on nabbing pushers and dealers rather than small-time users. But it's no easy task.

Police raids on now-infamous crack houses in Detroit typically net only a small amount of cocaine "to impress prosecutors or the courts," DeFauw said.

Most drug investigations are undercover, the method used by NET. Representatives from local police agencies throughout the county devote an officer on an annual basis to the drug enforcement team.

"We receive information. Then our source makes an introduction (to a dealer, for example) for us. We're in plainclothes. Investigations, though, take weeks, months, maybe longer," Monti said. "But NET does a good job. A lot of arrests have been made of multi-kilo dealers."

Local police agencies, such as Farmington and Farmington Hills, work cooperatively with organizations such as NET, the DEA and the Michigan State Police in combating the cocaine epidemic.

"Every case is judged on an ad hoc basis," DeFauw said.

THE ARREST last year of a Farmington Hills couple on charges of possession with intent to deliver and distribute cocaine was an example of cooperation between law enforcement agencies. DEA officers, with the help of Hills officers, raided the couple's house on Herndonwood last October.

Yet when asked why arrests don't appear to keep pace with the apparent extent of the growing cocaine problem, the DEA's DeFauw said the public can rest assured that when officers have information, an investigation is conducted.

"When we receive a complaint, it demands an investigation. And that takes a tremendous amount of time," he said.

Besides time, drug investigations also demand a lot of manpower as well as money. In order to nab a dealer, undercover officers often buy large quantities of cocaine. The cocaine is then used as evidence in obtaining search and arrest warrants and later in court

proceedings, law enforcement officials said.

The cocaine trade is generally highly decentralized. Urban-area dealers, for example, organize teenagers into small groups of pushers, couriers and lookouts. "Distribution network heads enforce discipline with severe violence, change locations frequently and alter their tactics constantly to foil narcotics agents," DeFauw said.

IN THE suburbs, the fight can be even tougher. Suburban residents who either use or deal in cocaine or crack are generally more educated and more inclined to avoid being caught because of their lifestyle, social and professional connections and the image they strive to maintain.

"They are a little more sophisticated, a little more aware of the law. So it is more difficult. But that just means we have to be better at what we do," Monti said.

Education is crucial in cocaine battle



Farmington public safety officers use a kit like the one above to determine whether substances are narcotics.

By Joanne Maliszewski Staff writer

"No doubt about it. Cocaine is a glorified drug that has long been associated with the socially 'in' crowd."

"Crack has been associated with the lower income, less-educated urban young."

But law enforcement and counseling agency officials are slowly seeing a change in the stereotypes. Most officials are certain that only a matter of time before crack joins cocaine as the drug of choice in the suburbs.

"Combating the growing epidemic use of cocaine and crack will take the cooperation of parents, educators and police, law enforcement officials maintain."

"And the start of the battle is with public education. "We have to educate the public. Parents have to watch their kids. And they can't be afraid to take

positive steps to stop it," said Pat Monti, a Farmington Hills detective who served a year as an undercover officer for the Oakland County Narcotics Enforcement Team (NET).

The popularity of cocaine and crack is blooming, mostly due to availability and low price. The drugs' popularity is also due to the high of the drugs provide.

COCAINE PROVIDES users with a 10- to 15-minute high. Those who use crack experience a high that is about five to 10 times greater than is experienced with the traditional method of snorting cocaine, Monti said.

"Once you inhale it (crack), it takes about 10 seconds to hit the brain," Monti said. "Once you get so high, you don't want to come back to normal."

What makes the crack high so much more intense is that in rock form, the cocaine is purer and, as a

result, more potent, addictive and deadly.

Like freebasing (which involves cooking out impurities with the help of ether), crack is smoked. When the cocaine vapors are taken into a person's lungs, the high is almost immediate, Monti said.

"When it is in vapor form, it goes directly into the bloodstream and directly to the brain," Farmington Hills Police William Dwyer said.

"The high lasts for only about 10 minutes. But it is addictive, both psychologically and physically. The high is quicker and much more intense, followed by deeper depression. And the addiction is deeper."

Since October 1985, when crack hit the streets, more than 600 deaths throughout the country have been linked directly to the drug's use, Dwyer said. In the Detroit area, more than 60 deaths have been linked to crack. But Dwyer said he believes the local figure is probably quite low because the

deadly effect of crack manifests itself as a heart attack.

THE UNITED States receives its illegal supplies of cocaine from South American countries — predominantly Columbia — through various entry routes. Florida is probably the most publicized port of entry.

But law enforcement officials are finding that Texas and California are now gaining on Florida as an entry port for cocaine. The drugs are sent across the country to Kentucky and up to Michigan, Monti said.

Crack is a homemade concoction processed in kitchens. Dealers and users take the powdered cocaine, add baking soda, a little water and heat the mixture.

Bacardi 151 rum, which is pure grain alcohol, is used to heat the cocaine mixture. "Rubbing alcohol won't get it hot enough," Farmington Public Safety Deputy Director Gary Goss said.

The baking soda is used as a catalyst to help remove impurities from the powdered cocaine. As the water and baking soda evaporate, a hardened substance — crack — forms.

Powdered cocaine contains impurities, such as Mantol, a baby laxative, and lactose. Dealers mix these substances into cocaine to increase its quality, Goss said.

The most popular method of smoking crack is with a glass pipe. The crack rock is put in the pipe on top of five-to-10 mesh screens. The screens prevent the rock from falling into the flame and melting. Crack cannot be snorted like powdered cocaine because it can't be dissolved, Monti said.

OTHER SMOKING methods are also available. Users either lace a marijuana cigarette with cocaine or lace smashed little pieces of the crack rock in a tobacco cigarette, Dwyer said.

Buying paraphernalia that accompanies the cocaine and crack habit is not illegal, at least not in Farmington or Farmington Hills. The city of Detroit, however, recently adopted an ordinance banning the sale of the equipment.

Some stores in the Farmington area sell paraphernalia, but police

'The high lasts for only about 10 minutes. But it is addictive, both psychologically and physically. The high is quicker and much more intense, followed by deeper depression.'

— William Dwyer police chief

report that it hasn't become a problem. "If we identify where there are a number of locations selling narcotics paraphernalia, I certainly would recommend to the city attorney to draw up an ordinance (prohibiting the sale)," Dwyer said.

Farmington also does not currently have an ordinance prohibiting the sale of narcotic paraphernalia, Goss said.

Though drug education programs are available through Farmington Families in Action and Farmington Advisory Council, law enforcement officials are asking for parents' direct help in combating cocaine and crack use.

Parents should look for changes in their child's behavior — school attendance, appearance — as well as sudden weight loss. Finding paraphernalia, such as a glass pipe or white powder in pockets or small packets, is another good indication of a problem, as is the constant need for money, Monti said.

"WE'RE SEEING cocaine come down from adults," Goss said. "But because of its availability, it's now running down to the kids."

The extent to which cocaine and crack has invaded the Farmington area's student population is anyone's guess.

But Lt. George Gibbard, head of NET, maintains that the use of cocaine and crack is "not that prevalent" in schools because for a youngster, the drug is still expensive. "Yet, if a person has the money, they can probably buy it. There will be a source somewhere."

Despite the publicity that law enforcement agencies are imbued with in their battle against cocaine

and crack trafficking, many users are seeking help before running headlong into the law.

"The number of calls we have received about cocaine and crack have definitely increased," said Mary Ruthenbeck, Farmington Advisory Council community service coordinator. "We treat cocaine people here now. And we are looking at an expansion with further specialization."

Like Farmington Families in Action, Farmington Advisory Council staff offer "school liaison activities," which include presentations, consultations and treatment for the whole spectrum of chemical dependency.

BUT FARMINGTON Advisory Council and Farmington Families in Action do not present educational programming specifically for cocaine or crack alone. "We haven't anything at this moment that we are zeroing in on. We don't want to neglect the other drugs, especially marijuana, a gateway drug," said Betty Nickoley, Families in Action president.

Farmington Hills police officials are planning to offer educational drug programs in the schools soon. They will be working to create "drug-free schools," Dwyer said.

"In the past, we have gone into the schools. But now, with the rapidity of crack and the low price, we feel this would be a priority (to discuss cocaine and crack)," he said. "It will be obviously most beneficial, not merely to the students, but to the parents as well. I would say we are fighting a war as far as narcotics. And we have to involve everyone."

To that end, Farmington and Farmington Hills police are busy educating themselves about cocaine and crack in anticipation of the drug's spread into the suburbs.

Some Farmington Hills officers will be joining the Detroit Police Narcotics Section on crack raids as an aid in learning about the drug and enforcement procedures, Dwyer said.

In Farmington, officers are being educated about cocaine and crack with the help of a new video, created by a former New York City narcotics officer, Goss said.