

# Drug trafficking riskier in Oakland

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

Drug trafficking was riskier, costlier and more dangerous in 1989 than it was in the previous year, according to statistics released by the Oakland County Narcotic Enforcement Team.

More people were arrested and more guns, money and property was seized in 1989 than in the previous 12 months, according to figures in the annual NET report, released Friday. The higher figures are a reflection of increased police activity, not necessarily a barometer of drug use throughout the county, said State Police Lt. Dorothy K. McAllen.

"We don't really know how widespread drug use really is," said McAllen, commander of NET, which has 29 officers from the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, the Michigan State Police and communities like Farmington Hills, Southfield, Troy and West Bloomfield. "But we do get a good idea of police activity from these figures."

FIGURES TELL drug users loudly and clearly that Oakland County is a risky place to do business, said McAllen, whose 15-year career includes stints as a sergeant in Livingston and Washtenaw counties and as a command officer of state police street narcotics units in Detroit.

To get an accurate picture of overall drug use, NET numbers have to be correlated with figures on the number people hospitalized for overdoses, the number admitted to treatment centers, attitudes and police commitment, said Donal L. Reising, director of the Michigan Office of Drug Agencies.

"Here numbers seldom tell the story," said Reising, who was appointed Michigan's drug czar after a legal career that included service as a prosecutor, circuit court judge and president of the Michigan State Bar Association.

"Some communities will have zero drug arrests," Reising said. "But that

doesn't mean they have zero drug usage."

"Other communities may have hundreds of nickel-dime arrests. But that doesn't mean their drug use is on the increase."

As Michigan drug czar, Reising is closely linked with numerous narcotics investigations. He hadn't seen the most recent NET figures, but Reising said he is familiar with similar annual reports around the state.

"We believe the level of drug usage across the state is flat," he said. "We believe it's relatively high, but not necessarily on the upswing. We can only get fragments of the total picture."

FRAGMENTS of the picture painted by the 1989 NET figures show an active drug scene that is getting more costly and more risky, almost from month to month, said McAllen.

The risk of getting caught and convicted is even greater, she said, because of the Oakland County grand jury convened to specifically probe into the narcotics traffic and unsolved murders.

The grand jury was in session for only four months of 1989, but during that time it was responsible for at least 15 indictments, according to Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson.

Thompson called the grand jury the county's most potent weapon in the war on drugs, mainly because it can compel testimony from otherwise reluctant witnesses — either through the promise of immunity or the threat of jail on contempt charges.

Earlier this month, Thompson convinced a majority of Oakland Circuit judges that two grand juries are needed. One will continue to convene until it winds down the investigations brought to its attentions since last September. The other will be called starting next month.

Thompson said. NET figures for last year profiles typical drug dealer as a white male,

18 to 23, who lives in Oakland County and may even hold a job here. While the typical dealer lives in a city or township, he sells outside his home turf, according to NET statistics.

"We can't pretend that our drug problem is from Flint, Detroit or elsewhere," said McAllen, who lives in Oakland County. "It's from here, around us."

HERE ARE OTHER parts of the narcotics picture in Oakland County as indicated by NET figures for 1989:

• Although many of the drug arrests were in Pontiac and the urbanized southern portion of Oakland, at least 5 percent were in rural areas like Springfield, Brandon and Oxford townships.

That shows drug traffic is not an exclusively urban problem, McAllen said, it's on the farm as well as on the streets.

• Although NET officers have not encountered any machine guns, McAllen said the weapons seized are more sophisticated as well as numerous. "We used to see a lot of cheap Saturday night specials," she

said. "Now we see expensive, high-powered rifles and pistol — many with scopes."

Weapons are a matter of showmanship with young dealers, she said, "part of the macho image to impress people. With experienced, high-volume dealers, guns are a matter of protection — not against police, but against other dealers who may rob them."

• Because of higher risks — arrest as well as robbery by other dealers — pushers are more leery of strangers, and take more time to size up a prospective buyer before making a sale, McAllen said.

"A year ago, dealers would trip all over themselves to sell to us," she said. "Now they're more cautious, more suspicious."

That may be part of the reason one NET statistic is down in 1989 compared with the previous year, she said.

Purchases and seizures of drugs were down — 405 in 1989, compared with 452 in 1988, for a decline of about 10 percent.

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## Drug Activity in Oakland County

A comparison of 1988 and 1989 statistics

	1988	1989	PERCENT
Drug Arrests	204	237	+16
Search Warrants Executed	52	101	+95
Purchases and Seizures	452	405	-10
Firearms Seized	42	68	+61
Cash Seized	\$146,044	\$2,305,920	\$2.1 million
Vehicles Seized	11	37	+236
Residences Seized	2	5	+150

Source: Oakland County Narcotic Enforcement Team

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