Pure cocaine, diluted with ingredients such as these, yields big money in street sales

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heroin in the Louisiana area," he said.

"Cocaine is in the same class for law
enforcement as heroin was some years ago," said Capt. John Welborn, head
of the Baton Rouge Police narcotics unit.

Like marijuana, cocaine is quickly being
accepted as a harmless social drug, and,
although illegal, is tacitly approved by
many segments of society, officials say.

All narcotics investigators agree that
the biggest lure of cocaine as a criminal
activity is that enormous amounts of
money can be made from handling it.

"It is one of the most lucrative of the
underworld enterprises," said Bill Dees, a
spokesman for the DEA in Washington D.C.

A cocaine smuggler can expect to
increase his initial investment many times
over simply by getting his merchandise
to the United States border.

A recent national report by the DEA
estimates that cocaine is a $5 billion
year industry in the United States.

Large shipments are becoming more
commonplace, one agent said. Until 1982,
any seizure over 100 kilograms was rare,
but shipments over a ton were intercepted
last year in Florida, and Louisiana agents
are beginning to see shipments of similar
magnitude.

Last year, customs agents in New Doria
made one of the biggest cocaine hauls
in the history of the nation. They found nearly
1,200 pounds, estimated to be worth $35
million, hidden inside cattle feed bags on
an airplane coming from Panama.

Officials say that for every person
catcheared there seem to be two ready to take
his place.

"Everybody is trying to get in on the
action," Whithworth said. "Anybody in
the cocaine business is in it to make money."