Lafayette Parish High On Drug Use Figures

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A 32-page packet of figures, tables and bar graphs recently released by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) tells something about Lafayette Parish most residents know.

The parish has a drug problem.

What residents may not fully understand is that the problem is bigger here than it is in other Louisiana parishes and, according to police, law enforcement officers, not enough is being done about it.

Some say we need tougher drug laws. Others say laws exist, but enforcement is stymied by slim budgets. Most say they’re not getting enough public cooperation.

State Are Frightening

First, consider some conclusions drawn by the DEA report for the U.S. Justice Department:

- Lafayette Parish, making up only 12.4 percent of the state’s population, accounts for 46.1 percent of the methamphetamine (speed) and 35 percent of the secobarbital (downers) distributed in the state.
- The percentage of methamphetamine distribution noted in Lafayette Parish is almost 10 percent more than that of Orleans Parish.

Those statistics do not separate legal from illegal drug uses. But the Baton Rouge DEA spokesman Howard Withworth confirmed in an interview for The Advertiser that drugs seized in Lafayette are "soapers" in Louisiana.

They are in the possession of addicts who traffic in illegal drugs for their own personal use. They are not considered prevalent here, most say.

More Hard Facts

Drugs confiscated within Lafayette city limits each year are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars on the average, Jackson said. Within the police department’s narcotics section alone, there were 264 drug arrests made in 1983 - some of them on people booked on multiple charges.

That excludes drug-related charges brought by uniformed officers in the city who are not members of the narcotics section.

Of the 264, 182 were felonies. First-time possession of marijuana is considered a misdemeanor. Possession of preludins or cocaine and distribution of any drug are felonies.

“Most crimes committed today are directly or indirectly related to drug abuse,” Theriot commented. “If the numbers seem high, just consider all the arrests for robberies, burglaries or assaults by people trying to get drug money.”

Preludins selling on the street for $15 a tablet three or four years ago are now up to $25 each. Jackson claimed. Marijuana, being sold almost solely in $80 one-ounce bags one year ago, is now going for $60 per half-ounce bag.

“Joints” are reportedly being sold in what Jackson calls “really, really thin rolls” for $2 each.

Cocaine, on the other hand, is “cheaper, but still not cheap,” he said. He put sales at $100 a gram, down from $140 a gram one year ago.

Additional Help Needed

Spokesmen for all local law enforcement agencies talked about needs for money to buy more equipment, make more undercover drug buys, hire more personnel and pay for overtime hours.

Theriot even mentioned a need for stricter seizure laws, such as those in Florida.

He said state police can often not use money seized in drug raids to funnel back into narcotics investigations, since such money must go back into the state’s general fund.

City Police are not as restricted, said Jackson, adding that his detectives are now using money seized in drug raids last year. If those cars are sold, the money goes back into his department, he said.

In either case, authorities are urging local residents to write or call their legislators for more money that can be put toward drug law enforcement.

They also ask that citizens take an active concern in drug abuse by reporting suspected drug users in drug raids last year. If those cars are sold, the money goes back into his department, he said.

The program is planned for 7 p.m. in the auditorium of the University Medical Center, and open to the public free of charge.