

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Pulse Check Report Describes the Impact of September 11 on Drug Use

“The September 11 terrorist attacks and subsequent events had varied short- and long-term effects on illegal drug availability, trafficking routes and modes, local marketing strategies, and use patterns,” according to the latest *Pulse Check* report (p. 1). Seventy-five epidemiologists, ethnographers, law enforcement officials, and methadone and non-methadone treatment providers from 20 cities across the U.S.¹ were interviewed between November 2001 and January 2002. Following are the overall findings concerning the impact of the terrorist attacks on drug use.

- **Decline in Availability:** In 12 of the 20 Pulse Check cities, availability of illegal drugs--particularly heroin--declined, possibly due to heightened security at U.S. airports, borders, and other points of entry. Two cities report increases in admissions to methadone clinics. However, many of these declines were short-lived. In Washington, DC, “where local drug dealers were more cautious about bringing drugs in shortly after September 11 due to heightened security at entry points,” the local drug trade had returned to pre-September 11 levels by December (p. 11).
- **Change in Trafficking Modes:** Several cities report that heightened airport security has caused drug trafficking modes to change. For example, Honolulu sources report that “law enforcement efforts are beginning to focus more on mail and marine smuggling because fewer people are smuggling heroin and cocaine via the airport” (p. 10).
- **Local Market Changes:** Temporary decreases in purity levels and price gouging were reported in several cities. In New York City, street researchers report that “drug dealers (especially heroin dealers) took advantage of the situation and operated openly in the street” (p. 11).
- **Increase in Prescription Drug Use:** The decline in heroin availability caused some heroin users to substitute prescription drugs. For example, in Baltimore “an emergency department nurse noticed more overdoses from drugs other than heroin, particularly OxyContin and other prescription opiates” (p. 11). In Miami, “both legitimate and illegal use of prescription drugs have increased since September 11, mostly involving people seeking benzodiazepines and sleep aids in an attempt to self-medicate and deal with added stress” (p. 12).

¹Baltimore, MD; Billings, MT; Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; Columbia, SC; Denver, CO; Detroit, MI; El Paso, TX; Honolulu, HI; Los Angeles, CA; Miami, FL; Memphis, TN; New Orleans, LA; New York City, NY; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, ME; St. Louis, MO; Seattle, WA; Sioux Falls, SD; Washington, DC.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Office of National Drug Control Policy, *Pulse Check: Trends in Drug Abuse, July-December 2001 Reporting Period*, 2002. Available online at <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/drugfact/pulsechk/2001/index.html>.