

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

National Pulse Check Report Describes Trends in Local Drug Market Activity

"In order to disrupt street-level drug local markets within local communities, it is necessary to understand how they operate" (p. 9).

The most recent *Pulse Check* survey interviewed 78 epidemiologists, ethnographers, law enforcement officials, and treatment providers from 20 cities across the U.S.* about their perceptions of local drug markets. Following are some of the observed trends and patterns in local drug market activity. A copy of the full report is available online (www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/drugfact/pulsechk/nov02/).

- **Availability of Drugs:** Both users and undercover police reported that marijuana was the most easily purchased illegal drug while methamphetamine was generally the most difficult drug to purchase on the streets, and accessibility varied greatly across the 20 sites.
- **When the Drug Market is Most Active:** Seven sites reported an increase in market activity at the times of the month when people receive paychecks or government checks and one site observed an increase around tax refund time. Several sites reported that markets appear more active on weekends and holidays. New York law enforcement reported increases in drug market activity when police presence is low, such as right after the September 11 attacks.
- **How Street-Level Dealers Communicate:** Law enforcement sources reported that cell phones and beepers were the most common means of communication between the dealers and their buyers, suppliers, and fellow dealers. Seven sites mentioned the use of regular phones, most often in dealer-to-dealer communications.
- **Transportation of Drugs to Selling Locations:** The most common mode of transportation for moving drugs is personal vehicles. Other modes of transportation included planes, rental cars, taxi cabs, and "trapped vehicles" (vehicles equipped with secret compartments). Foot traffic was mentioned as a mode of transportation in Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Seattle.
- **What Deters Street Drug Buys:** Commonly reported deterrents include intense and visible police presence, media coverage, overdoses, supply or demand changes, neighborhood changes, and legislative/sentencing changes.

*Baltimore, 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, January-June 2002 Reporting Period*, 2002.