Tracking drugs on their way to the street
by Tina McLanus

While intelligence about high-level drug dealing is an essential piece of the puzzle, Community Policing provides crucial information about what is really happening at the base of the drug pyramid:

- Commander Rudy Thomas, Detroit (MI) Police Department - Thomas says that there is a direct link between the high unemployment rate in Detroit among young black males and the large number of these young men who become drug dealers. Detroit police rely on citizen complaints in order to get information needed to deal with the city's drug problems.

- A 24-hour hotline, 224-DOPE, is a call-in service that citizens can use to make complaints or provide information about drug activities in their neighborhood. Narcotics Activity Forms are available at all mini-stations and precincts and are handed out at the monthly community-relations meetings between police and citizen groups to share intelligence at the neighborhood level.

- Roger Przybylski, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority - Przybylski's agency currently oversees the Drug Information and Analysis Center, which gathers research and analyzes information from various sources. The Authority is known for its sophisticated statistical analysis of crime and drug problems and the impressive quality of its publications. He says that he finds that courtesy and follow-up keep the information flowing.

- If a citizen calls in a complaint to the police, Przybylski encourages the officer to follow up, letting the person know the outcome of their actions and to thank them. If he goes to an emergency room to gather statistics on drug overdoses, he makes sure that they receive his findings once the information is compiled. With data in hand, it makes it easier to obtain resources to tackle the problem.

- Craig Fraser, Manager - Planning & Budget, City of Santa Ana (CA) Police Department - Fraser's department concentrates on obtaining information that can serve as the basis for a comprehensive drug strategy: Who are the dealers? Who are the users? Who are the outsiders coming in to make drug purchases? Where do they come from? What happens if a dealer is busted - where do his customers go and who comes in to replace him?
Santa Ana plans to sample street drugs weekly to check for purity and form and to see what drug strategies seem to be most effective.

- Assistance Chief Harold Hurtt, Phoenix (AZ) Police Department - Hurtt says that communication with the community is the first priority in the department. It sponsors the Citizen’s Academy where selected community leaders attend sessions one night a week for eight weeks to learn about all aspects of police operations. After they "graduate" from the academy, they often serve on police boards and do volunteer work, taking this experience with them back into the community to help people understand the system better and to open up communication.

- Neighborhood Fight Back is headed by the Deputy City Manager, and it includes the police as one of the many city departments represented. Together with community groups, they identify problem areas and work together to develop strategies to clean up the neighborhoods and fight crime.

- Roderick Beverly, Supervisory Special Agent, FBI, Drug Intelligence Unit - His office deals with complex, multinational drug cartels. In 1986, they determined that they would never have enough agents or resources to work on all groups, so they concentrated on finding the significant players in the drug-trafficking world. As a result, they developed the National Drug Strategy, which focuses on identifying and accessing the key players and areas where drugs come in, primarily in Los Angeles, New York, and Miami. Prime targets are individuals who deal out of Columbia and Mexico. By aiming at the wholesale level and above, they hope to impact street-level supply.

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