

2008 Interim Report by Florida Medical Examiners Commission on Drugs Identified in Deceased Persons Report

Nov 24, 2008

Today, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) released the Florida Medical Examiners Commission Report on Drugs Identified in Deceased Persons. The report contains information compiled from autopsies performed by medical examiners across the state from January through June 2008. During that period there were approximately 89,000 deaths in Florida. Of those, 4,055 individuals were found to have died with one or more of the drugs specified in this report in their bodies.

The report indicates the three most frequently occurring drugs found in decedents were Ethyl Alcohol (1,923), all Benzodiazepines (1,469), and Cocaine (955). The drugs that caused the most deaths were Oxycodone, all Benzodiazepines (with Alprazolam accounting for the majority of the deaths), Cocaine, Methadone, Ethyl Alcohol, Hydrocodone, and Morphine.

The three drugs that were the most lethal, meaning more than 50 percent of the deaths were caused by the drug when the drug was found, were Heroin (91.5 percent), Methadone (75 percent), and Oxycodone (60 percent).

Deaths caused by Methadone and Cocaine declined by 10.7 percent and 10.2 percent, respectively, compared to the last six months of 2007. In addition, deaths caused by Ethyl Alcohol, Fentanyl, and Propoxyphene declined in this report.

With Heroin continuing to be the most lethal drug named in this report, occurrences increased by 34 percent and deaths caused by Heroin also increased by 41.3 percent over the last half of 2007.

The report also indicates that prescription drugs continued to be found more often than illicit drugs in both lethal and non-lethal levels during the first part of this year. Prescription drugs account for 73 percent of all drug occurrences in this report when Ethyl Alcohol is excluded.

"As we seen in previous years, this report shows that prescription drugs continue to be a major source of drug abuse that leads to lethal results," said FDLE Commissioner Gerald Bailey. "FDLE and law enforcement partners are working aggressively to address prescription abuse and to take illegal narcotics off the streets."

"The Medical Examiners Report continues to provide important, but disturbing, information about the devastation caused by drug abuse," said William Janes, Director of the Office of Drug Control. "The report underscores the importance of warning Floridians that opiate-based pain relievers (like OxyContin and Vicodin), anti-anxiety medications (like Xanax and Valium), and alcohol are all central nervous system depressants that can fatally impair breathing and heartbeat. When mixed together, these prescription drugs and alcohol have dangerous synergistic effects. The Office of Drug Control continues to work with other state agencies and our community partners to stop these unacceptable trends."

Medical Examiners specifically collected information on these drugs: Ethyl Alcohol, Amphetamines, Methamphetamines, MDMA (Ecstasy), MDA, MDEA, Alprazolam, Diazepam, Flunitrazepam (Rohypnol), other Benzodiazepines, Cannabinoids (Marijuana), Carisoprodol/Meprobamate, Cocaine, GHB, Inhalants, Ketamine, Fentanyl, Heroin, Hydrocodone, Hydromorphone, Meperidine, Methadone, Morphine, Oxycodone, Propoxyphene, Tramadol, and Phencyclidine (PCP).

The Florida Medical Examiners Commission 2008 Interim Report of Drugs Identified in Deceased Persons is available on the FDLE Web site at www.fdle.state.fl.us

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