

Alaska Dispatch News

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[Tegan Hanlon](#) ^[1]

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Main Image:

[2014 Alaska State Troopers drug report](#) ^[2]

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Alaska Dispatch News

The quantity of heroin seized by Alaska State Troopers dropped by more than half in 2014 compared to the year before, but the number of drug-related arrests jumped, according to the [troopers' annual drug report released Friday](#) ^[3].

Lt. Rex Leath, deputy commander of the troopers' Statewide Drug Enforcement Unit, said when reviewing the report he took particular note of last year's 209 heroin-related arrests and charges. The statistic bolstered what the public had repeatedly reported, he said.

"The whole state has been really adamant that they feel like heroin is taking over their neighborhoods," Leath said. "All of these communities have been saying 'heroin, heroin, heroin.'"

The report identified an increase in heroin abuse and the continued abuse of other opiates as significant concerns, primarily in urban Alaska.

But [heroin has also penetrated rural communities](#) ^[4]. Seizures of heroin, methamphetamine and prescription drugs increased in rural communities in 2014, though alcohol and marijuana remained the most popular drugs, the report said.

Across Alaska, trooper seizures of alcohol, heroin and processed marijuana declined. Seizures of prescription drugs also dropped while seizures of cocaine and methamphetamine more than doubled, according to the report.

The number of marijuana grows busted remained unchanged at 38. The [number of meth labs closed dropped from five in 2013](#) ^[5] to zero last year. But, the report said, "although the number of labs has remained low, it appears that use and abuse of the drug lingers."

Marijuana accounted for the most drug-related arrests and charges by far at 716 last year. This year, troopers must alter enforcement efforts since the state legalized marijuana, Leath said. The law went into effect Tuesday.

The number of arrests and charges for [alcohol, cocaine and prescription drugs decreased in 2014 from 2013](#) ^[6], while they increased for marijuana, methamphetamine and heroin.

Leath cautioned that the annual changes in numbers of arrests and quantities of confiscated drugs don't always accurately reflect the prevalence of drugs in Alaska. The statistics waver with the number of community reports and the size of the Statewide Drug Enforcement Unit, which Leath said has shrunk.

He flagged the pounds of heroin seized as one deceptive statistic in the recent report. In 2014, troopers seized about 22 pounds of heroin, compared to about 55 pounds in 2013.

"People are breaking heroin down into smaller dosages," he said. "So the number doesn't really reflect accurately whether or not it's on the street."

In some areas, he said, troopers have tightened their focus on low-level heroin dealers instead of on big shipments. According to the report, heroin is typically imported into Alaska by both parcel and human carriers.

By focusing on the low-level dealers, busts yield smaller quantities of heroin. Leath said troopers have taken this approach to learn what drives dealers to sell. Many, they have found, are addicted to heroin themselves.

"Heroin, it literally is killing our kids," he said.

An earlier version of this story misstated the trend in cocaine seizures between 2013 and 2014.

Source URL: <http://www.adn.com/article/20150227/drug-seizures-down-arrests-2014-alaska-state-troopers-report>

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