

JPD drug take nears Anchorage levels

Report: \$5.8 million worth of illegal drugs seized in 2014

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According to a report released Friday by the Alaska State Troopers, the Juneau Police Department seized \$5.8 million worth of illegal drugs in 2014, just five percent less than the value of the drugs seized by the Anchorage Police Department.

The Municipality of Anchorage, with a population of 301,000 people, is almost nine times more populated than Juneau, but the surge in seizures appears to be due to good police work, not an increase in crime.

JPD released its drug-seizure statistics in early February, but information on other police departments was not available until Friday, when troopers published their annual report on the work of the Alaska Bureau of Investigation's Statewide Drug Enforcement Unit.

According to the report, the SDEU seized drugs with a street value of \$15.2 million — more than the Anchorage and Juneau figures combined. Fairbanks figures were not included in the report.

In 2013, JPD seized less than \$2 million in illegal drugs. The difference in 2014, JPD Lt. Kris Sell told KTOO-FM in February, was a series of large heroin busts. In 2014, JPD officers captured more than 10 pounds of heroin with a street value approaching \$4.7 million. In the previous year, they seized less than a pound and a half.

Seizures of illegally traded prescription drugs declined as their price rose in 2014, Sell said, leading users to switch to heroin.

Statewide, the troopers' drug unit seized 22 pounds of heroin, a figure down from 2013. Lt. Rex Leath, deputy commander of the troopers' drug unit, told Alaska Dispatch News that troopers focused on smaller dealers in 2014. Heroin arrests were up, from 151 to 209, even as the quantity of seized drugs fell.

Methamphetamine, previously identified as a top priority by troopers, also saw a change in strategy. Troopers seized no meth labs but captured almost 20 more pounds of methamphetamine and made almost 50 more arrests in 2014 than 2013.

This year promises changes in focus for statewide drug units as marijuana regulations change. In 2014, troopers made 716 marijuana-related arrests, seized almost 170 pounds of marijuana and eradicated 38 grow efforts.

In Juneau last year, JPD seized about 33.7 pounds of marijuana worth an estimated \$459,000.

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