

Increasing drug deaths tied to heroin, methamphetamines

■ **OVERDOSES:** Oregon's rate of drug-related fatalities has climbed to more than three a week.



PORTLAND (AP) — Heroin and methamphetamine are to blame for a dramatic increase in drug deaths in Oregon over the past three years, says Dr. Larry Lewman, state medical examiner.

"I think it's more use and more availability," Lewman says.

In the past 18 months, medical examiners have tied 255 deaths to illegal drugs — a rate of more than three fatalities a week.

The victims included a 23-year-old visitor from Virginia who came to Portland for a Grateful Dead concert and a man who died in a toilet stall at the upscale

Willamette Athletic Club on his 41st birthday.

On the weekend of July 15-16, Lewman performed autopsies on six people. Four had overdosed on drugs.

The increase in methamphetamine deaths has come as a new wave of the drug floods the Northwest, law enforcement officials say. High-potency, low-cost Mexican meth has given the stimulant new popularity.

The heroin deaths, however, have a longer history.

In the 1970s and even into the 1980s, Oregon recorded perhaps a dozen drug deaths a year. Then came tar heroin. It began showing up in Oregon in the 1980s, shipped in from Mexico.

"When tar heroin came, the numbers started skyrocketing," Lewman says.

Instead of roughly one drug death a month in Oregon, the death toll leaped to

more than one a week. A total of 117 Oregonians died from heroin overdoses alone in 1985 and 1986.

The problem has intensified in the 1990s, Lewman says. Since January 1993, heroin deaths have increased to a rate of two a week.

Most of the heroin victims are white males. The average age is in the mid-30s. Although the drug deaths occur all over Oregon, most are in the Portland area.

The overwhelming majority die from injecting drugs rather than snorting or smoking them — "Russian roulette with a needle," as Lewman calls it.

"It's dangerous and self-destructive behavior," Lewman says. "Eventually it's going to get you if you persist in using it."

Twice over the years, there have been noticeable drops in the number of heroin deaths. "This was right when these multi-agency task forces were locking up major

drug-distribution networks," Lewman says. "But it's just a matter of time before some enterprising entrepreneur takes their place."

The most marked example came in November 1990, when the Regional Organized Crime Narcotics Task Force arrested a group of men accused of smuggling unusually potent heroin into the Pacific Northwest.

After the arrests, the number of deaths slowed dramatically. In the first five months of 1991, only six Oregonians died of drug overdoses, compared with 52 during the same period in 1990.

But by the end of 1992, the numbers were back up. And two years later, they had nearly doubled again.

"The only thing they're illustrating is that aggressive law enforcement can address it, but only for the short term," Lewman says.

Honor: 132 professors named so far

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the representation of gender in the African press.

Italy is the destination for associate professor of history Daniel Pope. From January through July of 1996, Pope will be teaching American history and literature at the University of Rome.

Pope said he was "very pleased" about receiving the grant.

"I'm trying to learn some Italian," Pope said. "But my teaching will be in English."

Janet Wasko, associate professor of journalism and communication, will be at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark from September through December of this year. She will be teaching and conducting research on mass communication and the international marketing of American popular culture products, such as films

and television shows. Wasko will also be researching foreign audience responses to Disney and Disney products.

"Does Disney represent America to them?" Wasko said. "What does it say about America?"

Margaret Ramsing, assistant professor in the Office of International Education and Exchange, is in Japan for a month this summer. Ramsing is one of six U.S. faculty participating in the U.S.-Japan International Education Administrators Program.

Another University faculty member, Bill Ryan, associate professor of journalism and communication, was awarded a Fulbright grant to Singapore but declined the offer.

This recent selection of Fulbright grants brings the number of University professors who have been recipients to 132.

Closing arguments center on credibility of witnesses

■ **RAJNEESHEES:** The fate of two women, charged with conspiracy to murder, now rests with jurors

PORTLAND (AP) — After a long day of closing arguments by five attorneys Monday, jurors were to begin deliberations today in the trial of two former Rajneeshee leaders accused of conspiring 10 years ago to kill the U.S. attorney for Oregon.

In a case where witness credibility means everything, the jurors will have the final say on whether the truth has been told.

Sally-Anne Croft and Susan Hagan fought extradition from England for years before they finally were brought to the United States to face the charges.

They are accused of conspiring with nine others to kill Charles Turner in 1985. Turner, as U.S. attorney for Oregon, was leading an investigation into widespread immigration fraud at the north-central Oregon commune where guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh lived with his fleet of Rolls Royces and thousands of chanting, dancing, red-garbed followers.

The prosecution's case is based on the testimony of six former Rajneeshees who had cut deals

with the government.

Prosecutors T.J. Reardon III and Scott Glick said the witnesses were truthful transgressors who were sorry for what they had done.

"This case is about reality, responsibility, remorse and redemption," Reardon said.

But defense attorneys, who called only one witness, said the prosecution was counting on the statements of conniving liars who were willing to say whatever the government wanted them to say.

"They are all self-centered, self-interested people," Croft's attorney Leslie Weatherhead said. "These people were strivers and seekers. They are classic criminal personalities."

All had admitted they have lied in the past, sometimes under oath, sometimes on documents, such as a gun purchase records.

The defense suggested the witnesses had altered their stories over the years in order to make them consistent with each other. They also pointed out contradictions in some of the testimony.

But Reardon said those inconsistencies proved that there was no orchestration of testimony. It's been 10 years, he said, and stories are bound to vary.

Conspiracy cases don't unravel, Reardon said, until some of those involved begin to talk.

"Essentially what you have is people have told on people, just like when we were kids," Reardon said.

To win a guilty verdict, Glick said the government had only to prove that one "overt" act was committed to further the conspiracy. "In this case, we have at least 19 separate and distinct overt acts," he said. "So we're way past talking. We are way past one overt act. We are way down the line."

Government witnesses said Croft, known at the commune as Ma Prem Savita, was third in the line behind Rajneesh and his personal secretary, Ma Anand Sheela. Croft managed the commune's finances and supplied money used to illegally buy guns that were to be used to kill Turner, witnesses testified.

Hagan, known as Ma Anand Su, was in charge of the Rajneeshee Investment Corp. She gave a pep talk in support of Sheela and the Turner murder plot at a planning meeting, witnesses said. One witness said Hagan also had ordered a Rajneeshee to go to Portland to join the group following Turner. Two witnesses said Hagan was part of the hit team formed to carry out the killing.

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