

Meth has become king of drugs

[By DENNIS HUSPENI - THE GAZETTE](#)

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The public safety page examines crime patterns in the city using annual statistics compiled by the Colorado Springs Police Department.

Cocaine and crack use in the city has declined steadily, but that may be because more addicts are turning to methamphetamine.

That's according to a three-year narcotics study released this month by the Colorado Springs Police Department's vice-narcotics unit.

"Metro VNI has seen a decrease in cocaine use and seizures," the study states. "This is due in part to the availability and increase of methamphetamine."

In 2002, Colorado Springs had the 10th highest number of meth labs busted of any city in the country, according to the El Paso County Intelligence Center.

"Meth has surpassed coke as the drug of choice," said Cmdr. Kurt Pillard, head of the narcotics unit. "At one point a couple of years ago, cocaine — especially crack — was the drug of choice. Now, because of the extended high you get, most users prefer meth."

Meth is also easier to get.

Ever since the Sept. 11 attacks, the borders have been shut down tighter, which has stemmed the flow of cocaine.

During the period of the study, the number of meth labs seized in the city increased from 79 in 2000 to 153 in 2002. In that same period, the number of felony cocaine arrests fell from 411 in 2000 to 59 in 2002.

Kirsten Bilzing, a licensed addictions counselor for Reigel Center outpatient program, said they have seen fewer and fewer cocaine addicts in the past couple of years.

Meth addicts they are seeing run higher health risks and seem to have a harder time kicking the habit, however.

"Meth is more poisonous — God knows what kind of chemicals might be in it," Bilzing said.

She agreed with Pillard that addicts prefer meth because the high lasts longer for about the same price.

"It's a strong high, that's horribly addictive, then there's a huge drop to depression," said Marsha Ritterband, a licensed social worker who treats drug addicts at Reigel.

Many mistakenly believe drug problems are limited to the poorer areas of the city.

Although the south side may have more lower- to middle-income neighborhoods, experts say drug use crosses all lines.

“I’m really not surprised at the drug activity up north,” Bilzing said. “A lot of middle-class people are addicted to drugs.”

Ritterband said she’s seen a number of women with middle-class and upper-class lives using meth to lose weight.

“They use it as a diet aid, then they get addicted,” Ritterband said.

“I’ve also seen people use it to get more work done, finish a project or to help stay up at night,” Bilzing said.

Police statistics on reports of drug sales, use and production in 2003 illustrate the point. The same amount of narcotics activity happened north of Woodmen Road as in the area surrounding South Academy and Fountain boulevards.

Pillard said anytime you have a high concentration of people living in an area, the drug activity will be higher.

“If you look at the number of apartment complexes, you’ll see roughly the same number” on the north side as on the south side, he said.

It also may surprise some to learn meth lab busts occur all over the city.

A map of meth labs seizures (available at www.springsgov.com/Page.asp?NavID=4277) shows they’re spread all over.

“It looks like someone shot the map with a shotgun,” Pillard said.

The main reason for that is that meth lab cooks don’t want to use their home to brew toxic chemicals — so they find rentals and hotel rooms. Those, of course, can be found all over the city.

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