

# Courts: City drug officer says sentences are 'getting lighter'

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Then the days or even weeks of investigation begin.

But all the effort put into crack investigations can sometimes be lost once cases reach court, Bair said.

When crack charges began to appear in Guelph courts in the late 1990s, he said judges were handing out strict sentences.

"But now crack is becoming more commonplace. People are less shocked and concerned about its presence and recently the sentences have been getting lighter," he said.

Under the Criminal Code, the maximum sentence for possession of crack is seven years and for trafficking crack it is life in prison, but the maximum sentence is rarely handed out.

In Guelph, sentencing on average for people guilty of possession of crack ranges from a fine to a couple months in jail.

The average sentence given to people found guilty of trafficking crack ranges from house arrest to a year in jail.

"The only way we can change the sentences being handed out is if people take notice and get concerned about crack being in their community," Bair said.

The number of cocaine-related charges rose 61 per cent from 28 in 2003 to 45 last year. The majority of those arrests were for trafficking, Bair said. Police managed to seize a street value of \$60,000 worth of crack cocaine before it hit the streets.

As of June this year, officers had already seized \$39,000 worth of the drug and made 40 arrests. Of the 40 arrests for crack, 27 involved trafficking charges.

But police are only scratching the surface, Bair said.

Officers work in frustration know-

ing the problem is too big to tackle. At any one time there are at least 10 active crack houses in Guelph, Bair said, and no neighbourhood in the city goes untouched.

"We have them in all ends of the city. They can be houses, townhouses or apartments. We know they are there, but we don't have the resources to do the surveillance and the warrants needed to bust them."

Crack houses are flea markets of criminal activity filled with prostitution and violence, he said.

Drug addicts will spend hours, even days in crack houses smoking hit after hit, while dealers conduct their business exchanging drugs for cash, sex and stolen property.

Waterloo drug investigator Sergeant Rob Gibson said the drug scene in Kitchener-Waterloo is now playing out in Guelph.

"We have had a huge crack problem over the past 10 years and it has now moved over to Guelph," Gibson said. "When we started to see crack cocaine here in the mid 1990s, it was non-existent in Guelph."

Like the Guelph drug unit, Waterloo's investigators started off targeting the larger dealers but it's a constant struggle to keep up, Gibson said.

The only truly effective way to have any success in decreasing the amount of crack cocaine in a city is through educating young people in school, he said.

Children as young as 10 and 11 years of age need to be taught about the dangers of crack cocaine and drugs in general.

"You have to eliminate the people who want the drug," Gibson said. "We haven't had success in cutting off the source. The drug is here more than it ever was, so what other choice is there but education?"



NATHAN DENETTE, GUELPH MERCURY  
Police struggle to keep up with the crack that's flooding the community, a problem that is mirroring Waterloo Region's situation over the last decade.



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Athens	sunny	36	Barbados tshowers 32
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Beijing	sunny	25	Havana tshowers 34
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# Toxin: Scientists battle 'wolf in sheep's clothing'

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"It's essentially a wolf in sheep's clothing," Merrill said. "The toxins are using mimicry to go about their business. We were surprised. It's a brilliant design by the organism."

The enzyme is also "kissing cousins" with toxins used by other bacteria that cause well-known diseases such as diphtheria and cholera, Merrill said. He hopes and expects his discovery will lead to spin-off research in those areas.

Joe Lam, a Canada Research Chair in Cystic Fibrosis, said scientists already knew the toxin disrupts the cell's ability to make protein.

"But people didn't know exactly how it works, so Dr. Merrill's discovery is really phenomenal," Lam said.

"It is really spectacular and

very important."

Merrill worked with scientists at the University of Aarhus while on sabbatical in Denmark through the 2003-04 academic year. Using X-ray technology, they produced three-dimensional structures showing how the toxin binds to the ribosomal protein to cloak itself.

Now that they understand the structure of the complex in detail, Merrill said they can better understand the toxin's function.

"If we know how it works, we have a better shot at disabling the weapon," he said.

The discovery is also a step towards fighting the bacteria that creates the toxin.

Exotoxin A is produced by pseudomonas aeruginosa, which

Merrill calls "the samurai warrior of the bacterial world."

"It can attack humans, it can attack animals, it can attack other bacteria. It's just one of those unfriendly organisms," he said. "It's a general pathogen that affects many patients. It can also cause organ damage."

"It has so many weapons at its disposal."

Merrill said the toxin he examined is just one of those weapons.

Two floors above Merrill's office at the university's new science complex, Lam is working on disabling another of the bacteria's weapons. Once it's colonized in the body, the bacteria forms a layer of mucus that drugs won't penetrate. Lam is trying to figure out how to break through that shield.

"The bacteria is highly resistant to drug therapy," Lam said. "Even if there's a bottle of disinfectant soap in the hospital that has been sitting for a while, within the bottom of the bottle, there's probably a layer of this organism."

He said it attacks people whose immune systems have weakened due to disease or injury, and 70 per cent of patients in Canada with cystic fibrosis are infected, which compounds their respiratory problems.

Merrill said it will take a multi-pronged approach involving different branches of science to solve the problem and his discovery is just one piece of a complicated puzzle.

"Life's just not that simple," he said. "It's a major step forward but we're still a long way away."

# Surgeries: Weight leads to wear and tear

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Dr. Cathy Alderdice agrees that obesity is a risk factor for joint replacement surgeries and added as obesity rates increase within the population, she does see more individuals with osteoarthritis, a key diagnosis for joint replacement.

"It's a wear-and-tear arthritis," said the Guelph physician, who specializes in rheumatology. "The more weight you put on a weight-bearing joint...over time you'll start wearing it down."

Sports physician Margo Mount Joy

said she always tells her patients under consideration for hip and knee replacements to lose weight and stay fit.

"It highlights the big problem (of obesity) in our society," said Mount Joy, who works at the Health and Performance Centre.

De Guia said across Canada, obesity rates have doubled in the last decade.

After her surgeries, Ozaki is realizing the importance of lowering her weight.

She has lost 10 pounds and is exercising at the gym and taking an aqua-fit program to shed more pounds.

"If we reduce obesity rates, then we'll reduce prevalence of osteoarthritis and help address wait times," De Guia said.

A study in April by the Clinical Evaluative Sciences showed that Waterloo-Wellington fared better than other regions in hip and knee replacements with a median wait time of 21 weeks for hip replacements and 28 weeks for knees. The maximum recommended wait is 26 weeks for both procedures.

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