

Heroin Use Soars in Rural Areas



Rural areas are seeing a surge in heroin use, *The Wall Street Journal* reports.

The rise comes as Mexican heroin production has increased in recent years.

Officials seized 1,989 kilograms of heroin at the Southwest border, from Texas to California, in 2012, up from 487 kilograms in 2008, the article notes.

Many people who were addicted to prescription painkillers switched to heroin after drug companies made their products more difficult to crush and snort. Heroin is also much less expensive than pills such as oxycodone.

According to the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, the number of people who were past-year heroin users in 2011 (620,000) was higher than the number in 2007 (373,000).

"Basically, you have a generation of ready-made heroin addicts," Matthew Barnes, special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's Seattle division, told the newspaper.

According to drug experts, heroin is generally purer and more potent today than in decades past. This increases the risk of an overdose.

Rural areas experiencing an increase in heroin use often are unprepared to respond. They do not have adequate treatment facilities, or hospital emergency rooms that can treat overdoses. Local police forces do not have the staff to handle an increased level of narcotic investigations and drug-related crimes.

Skip Holbrook, the Police Chief in Huntington, West Virginia, where heroin has become the biggest drug problem, says the drug "transcends all areas of our town. It is absolutely the most pressing issue that we face."