

WRAL INVESTIGATES

'They are dealing death': WRAL Investigates goes undercover to get firsthand look at fentanyl crisis in NC

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It's a killer the size of grain of sand or the tip of a pen. Illegal fentanyl is running rampant through North Carolina, and the consequences are terrifying.

Fentanyl deaths are on the rise in North Carolina. Last year, [4,000 people lost their lives to drug overdoses](#) in our state. The majority — 77% — died due to fentanyl poisoning.

The Nash County Sheriff's Office recently confiscated enough fentanyl to kill every person in the county. WRAL Investigates spent several days with undercover agents and confidential informants on the streets of Nash County as law enforcement battles the war on this poison.

Early one summer morning, the Nash County Sheriff's Special Response Team conducted a search at a mobile home. A family, including kids in their pajamas, fled out of the home. One person came out in handcuffs.

"Children put things in their mouth. That makes it more alarming," said one member of the response team.

With their work done at the mobile home, the next raid was on, this time in Rocky Mount. A flash bang disrupts the silence at a home on Pine Street. The SRT quickly enters the home yelling, "Come to the center of the room" and "Hands Up!"

"This is an older neighborhood with a lot of good families in it. This house — drugs were bought out of it yesterday," WRAL Investigates was told.

A search revealed fentanyl and heroin, as well as a stolen gun. The SRT also found high-powered ammunition.

"As you can see with tips of these they are capable of going through wood-framed houses and bullet-proof vests," investigators told WRAL Investigates.

Targeting guns, drugs and gangs is the mission of the Nash County Sheriff's Office under the direction of Sheriff Keith Stone.

"You are having more people die from fentanyl overdoses than you are in car wrecks and guns," Stone said. "A grain of fentanyl can kill you, a grain of salt," he added.

There have been seven fentanyl deaths so far this year in Nash County. There were 14 in 2022. Overdose calls are also on the rise. There have been 190 this year alone.

Police work starts long before the raids and arrests though. The narcotics team often uses confidential informants or "CIs" to buy the drugs before they execute a search warrant.

Deputies allowed WRAL Investigates to watch an undercover operation in Rocky Mount. That CI bought several bindles (a small package) of heroin, likely laced with fentanyl. The buy took place in the middle of the day with children around.

Some dosage units were branded as "Power Ball." Users seek out the dealer with the most potent concoction. Unfortunately, with fentanyl, the search for the quickest high can have deadly consequences.

The CI who spoke to WRAL Investigates calls the undercover work "a dream." After she saw a friend overdose, she said this was her calling. She's a former health care worker and a drug user.

While the work is rewarding, she said it's also scary.

"What I do, that is what worries me, they are not able to always look after me," she said of the response team's inability to always track her during buys.

She said fentanyl, which is all over the department's evidence room, is rampant in Nash County. She describes the amount of fentanyl it takes to become deadly as scary. Often users can't tell whether or when it's mixed in with other drugs.

So far this year, the Nash County Sheriff's Office has confiscated more than \$661,000 worth of drugs off the streets. Last year, they took in 10 times that amount.

Stone said it's everywhere.

"It can be in a half-million dollar house or it can be in a mobile home, or in a roadside hotel," he said.

WRAL Investigates went along on a raid to Hal Orrs Inn in Rocky Mount. It was the second time that week that the response team had targeted the hotel.

"When we went to serve the search warrant, he had a female inside that was overdosing, had to apply Narcan," deputies said. Narcan is a drug that reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.

During this raid, they again found fentanyl and heroin.

"The drugs were hidden inside hotel cups paper cups in plastic," WRAL News was told.

A suspect was quickly arrested. Stone said law enforcement must be aggressive and proactive, on the streets and in court.

"We are gonna prosecute these traffickers," he said. "They are dealing death."