
What War on Drugs? Part 3

Crack: the pushers' answer to 'just say no'

by Scott Thompson

A new form of cocaine addiction using a freebase of cocaine hydrochloride known as "crack" or "rock" has swept the inner-cities of the United States since the Reagan-Bush administration announced its "War on Drugs." "Crack" is the pushers' response to Nancy Reagan's much-publicized campaign to end drug abuse by having American youth "just say no"! In the view of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), corroborated by medical experts, "crack" can be more psychologically addictive than heroin. And, it is rapidly replacing marijuana as the preferred drug among ghetto youth.

A National Institute of Drug Abuse study in 1987 reported that 5.6% of high school seniors reported having used "crack," while 4% reported using it in 12 months prior to the survey. The survey is believed to vastly underestimate the problem, because dropouts are more likely users of "crack" than those who finish the last year of high school. A more comprehensive survey of "crack" addiction by the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, based upon statistics kept by local law enforcement in 39 U.S. cities, has found the "crack" problem to be "severe" in 13 of those cities. By "severe" the House Select Committee means that upwards of 70% of the arrests for cocaine use and distribution were "crack"-related.

Dr. John Grauerholz, the former deputy chief medical examiner in Rhode Island, confirms that "crack" can be as psychologically addictive as heroin. Cocaine hydrochloride is a salt-like material that is soluble in water but cannot be smoked easily; however this cocaine salt can be converted into a freebase form which readily turns into a vapor when heated. This freebase form can then be inhaled and absorbed rapidly through the lungs. Taken in this way, cocaine gets to the brain more rapidly than when cocaine is injected by the intravenous route. The rapid onset of effect and the very high blood levels produced make this route far more likely to produce both addiction and toxicity. Also the euphoria produced by this route, lasting approximately four minutes, is

intense. Moreover, the euphoria is followed rapidly by a crashing low or depression. It is this sudden collapse from a state of intense euphoria that is the hook for addiction.

The Drug Enforcement Administration's DAWN system, which obtains information from emergency rooms in 27 urban centers, indicates that cocaine-related emergency room episodes in these areas tripled from around 3,000 in 1981 to almost 10,000 in 1985. In 1983, 2% of cocaine-related emergency room episodes involved smoked cocaine. In the first quarter of 1986 it was 14%. Of these, 78% were in the cities of Miami, Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York.

The "crack" wave of addiction has been accompanied by a related wave of violent crime. According to DEA estimates, between 55% and 60% of violent crime in urban centers is based upon drug addiction. "Crack" has added to this wave of secondary crime for three reasons: 1) Medical experts state that the downside of "crack" use produces a state of extreme paranoia, which is often accompanied by violent attacks upon family members and friends of the "crack" addict; 2) The House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse estimates that the average "crack" addict spends \$100 a day to maintain his addiction, and this money is often raised by ghetto youth through violent crime; and, 3) Ghetto gangs have become increasingly organized by syndicated "crack" dealers to act as pushers and protection for the racket.

City-by-city 'crack' survey

Under John T. Cusack, the chief of staff of the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, a staff survey by law enforcement officers has been carried out in 39 major urban centers. This survey found the "crack" problem to be severe in 13 of those cities, although the overall trend among ghetto youth was that the problem was mushrooming across the United States. The following is a report on the "crack" problem as it appears in the 13 cities which were ranked "severe."

● **New York City:** The New York Police Department reports that it first became aware of "crack" cocaine in January 1985, when their police laboratory was first presented with it for analysis purposes. During January 1986, "crack" became readily available on the street for as little as \$10.00 a hit. "Crack" is now available in all five boroughs of the city, as well as in suburban Westchester and Nassau Counties in New York. Within five months of this sudden appearance of "crack," there had been 1,056 "crack-related" arrests in NYC.

A special anti-"crack" unit was formed on May 21, 1986 consisting of 224 investigators, which quickly executed search warrants on 117 "crack" houses. Despite this, "crack" has become the drug of choice, and a popular trend in NYC is the smoking of "crack" in conjunction with phencyclidine (PCP), which is commonly referred to as "space-basing."

"Crack" distribution is becoming syndicated by Jamaican and Dominican gangs or "posses," who buy cocaine for conversion to "crack" from the Colombian mafia. The DEA and New York Police Department just arrested Delray "Uzi" Edwards, head of the Rankers Posse, aka Southies, which sold \$40,000-100,000 a day worth of "crack." Edwards and six other members of his organization face federal murder charges for five murders, nine attempted murders, six shootings, and one abduction.

● **Miami:** The Miami Police Department reported in 1986 that they are seizing an average of 600 to 1,000 pieces of "crack" a week. Through a program that has drawn nationwide attention, Miami Police are arresting between 20-30 distributors and 50-100 buyers of "crack" per week. Still, the PD reports that the situation in Miami is "totally out of control."

DEA sources report that only street-level drug dealers will peddle "crack," not the Colombian mafia that imports 1,000 to 1,500 kilos a week of cocaine hydrochloride through the Miami-South Florida region. However, as in New York, "crack" distribution is becoming relatively more "syndicated." In February 1988, the DEA assisted the Metro-Dade Police Department in the arrest of Isaac Hicks, a black construction company owner, who was operating 24 "crack" houses. Ledgers seized in two of those houses showed \$300,000 in sales per week for each house.

● **Boston:** From December 1985 to July 1986, there have been 76 arrests in Massachusetts for "crack" cocaine. Fifty-nine of those arrests were made in Boston. Some of the "crack" sold in Boston appears to have been imported from New York.

● **Newark, New Jersey:** The Newark Police Department reports that 70% of their drug arrests are for "crack" cocaine and that the availability of "crack" at the street level has reached "epidemic proportions." Between September 1985 and July 1986, they arrested 600 persons in connection with "crack."

● **Detroit:** During the six months prior to July 1986, the

Detroit Police Department made 4,000 arrests for "crack" cocaine. Seventy percent of their drug case load involves "crack." There are in excess of 600 "crack" houses operating in Detroit. The trend in Detroit is to smoke "crack" in conjunction with marijuana. Police believe that a rapid rise in the crime rate is to be attributed to the availability of "crack."

● **Houston:** The Houston Police Department reports that they are making an average of 36 arrests per week for "crack," and they are executing search warrants on 2-3 "crack" houses a week. The largest single seizure to date (involving 100 vials of "crack") was the result of an investigation called "The New York Connection"; persons in New York were supplying drug dealers in Houston with "crack."

● **San Francisco:** The San Francisco Police Department has made 100 arrests involving "crack." Their largest single seizure involved 854 grams of "crack." Police estimate that there are 75-100 "crack" houses in the city.

● **Los Angeles:** The Los Angeles Police Department reports that "crack" has been sold on the streets of Los Angeles since 1981. Between January and July 1986, 4,600 pounds of cocaine were seized. During a six-month period in 1986, the Los Angeles Police Department made 314 "crack"-related arrests, raided 186 "crack" houses, and seized in excess of 5,100 grams of "crack." Most of the "crack" houses are located in Watts, and police note a sharp increase in the crime rate because of the heavy "crack" traffic in city streets.

● **San Diego:** The San Diego Police Department reports that "crack" has fast become the number-one drug of choice at the street level; it has replaced phencyclidine (PCP) and marijuana. There are several hundred "crack" houses operating in the city. Police describe the crime situation arising from widespread "crack" addiction to be "desperate."

● **Oakland, California:** The Oakland Police Department reported that 90% of the street dealers are selling "crack." Eighty percent of the drug-related arrests are for "crack." "Crack" has rapidly replaced cocaine hydrochloride as the drug of choice. During the period between Jan. and June 1986, the police made 906 "crack"-related arrests and seized 17,249 grams of "crack."

● **Portland, Oregon:** Police report that there are 100 or more "crack" houses in operation. Robberies are up as a result of the street sales of "crack."

● **Minneapolis:** The police department reports that within a six-month period during 1986, they made 50 undercover buys of "crack" and averaged 30 arrests per month for the drug. There are a number of "crack" houses operating in the north and south sections of the city, and there has been a corresponding rise in street crime in those areas. The source of "crack" for Minneapolis is believed to be Chicago.

● **Seattle:** The Seattle Police Department reports that 99% of their law enforcement effort has been devoted to "crack." There are 200-300 known "crack" houses operating in Seattle. During a six-month period in 1986, there were 21 overdose deaths involving "crack."