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Fentanyl seizures set to more than double for third year in a row

SANTA ANA, Ca. (October 17, 2019) – The Orange County Sheriff's Department (OCSD) has seen a marked increase in seizures of fentanyl thus far in 2019, with one recent seizure equaling almost half of the total amount of fentanyl seized in the entire year of 2018.

Multiple enforcement, narcotics, gang and interdiction teams covering OCSD contract cities and unincorporated areas work tirelessly to interdict illicit drugs. Pharmaceutical fentanyl, a synthetic opioid pain reliever, is similar to morphine but is 50 to 100 times more potent. Illicit fentanyl, sold on the street, started to emerge locally in 2017. In 2016, teams seized less than one pound of fentanyl. In 2018, teams seized 44 pounds of fentanyl. Thus far in 2019, teams have seized more than 100 pounds of confirmed fentanyl, more than doubling from 2018 totals with two and a half months left in the year.

"The threat this extremely potent drug poses to our community is increasing exponentially, not subsiding," said Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes.

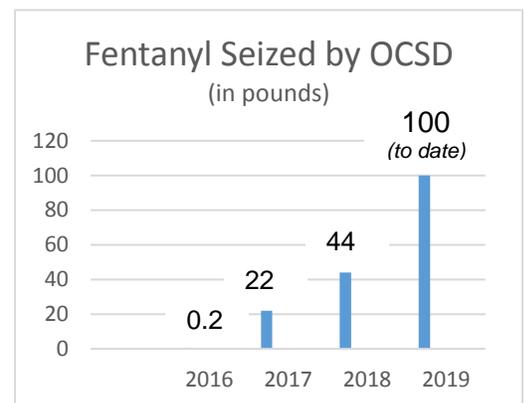
A recent seizure in north Orange County on October 16, 2019, included more than 18 pounds of fentanyl, along with 5 pounds of heroin, half of a pound of meth, \$71,000 in cash, and a loaded semi-automatic handgun. The fentanyl from this seizure has a street value of more than \$1.25 million and contains more than 4 million fatal doses, enough to overdose every person who resides in the County of Orange.

The increase in the presence of fentanyl has had deadly consequences. According to the California Department of Health, statewide fentanyl deaths increased 614% from 104 in 2014 to 743 in 2018. Orange County fentanyl deaths jumped by 564% from 14 in 2014 to 93 in 2018.

OCSD has sponsored legislation with Orange County's California Senator Pat Bates that would help protect Californians from the dangers of fentanyl and pursue illegal distributors. The proposed bills have been defeated for the last four years. In March 2019, the State Senate declined to pass [Senate Bill 161](#). Sen. Bates introduced similar legislation in 2016, 2017 and 2018. The Senate Public Safety Committee blocked [SB 1103](#) in 2018 and [SB 176](#) in 2017. In 2016, the Assembly Appropriations Committee did not approve [SB 1323](#).

"Our Sacramento legislators can no longer ignore the direct and legitimate threat of fentanyl," said Sheriff Barnes. "Drug trafficking organizations are taking advantage of gaps in the law. Until we categorically include enhancements for trafficking fentanyl and make its penalties similar to other illicit drugs like cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine, we are enticing and encouraging drug traffickers to increase the supply of fentanyl into California at the expense of children and families in our community."

"I hope the shocking increase in fentanyl seizures in Orange County will serve as a wake-up call to my legislative colleagues to finally confront the dangers of fentanyl," said Senator Bates. "The state has a responsibility to deter those who seek to profit from the addiction of Californians. I will continue to work with Sheriff Barnes and other law enforcement leaders to champion solutions in the Legislature."



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