

# on The STREET

## WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP THE POLICE?

*by Sergeant Dan Lewis*

With rare exception, today's average citizen has had some contact with illicit drugs. Whether through family members, friends, acquaintances or from personal experience, each of us knows of or has suffered a drug-related tragedy. In the past, most of these contacts have been distant, but today more and more people are reporting drug activity in their own suburban neighborhoods.

As the visibility of drug activity increases, the number of telephone calls from private citizens who wish to provide information to local law enforcement agencies also increases. But many people become frustrated by what appears to be a lack of interest or effort by these agencies to act on such information. This article is written in an attempt to explain what you as a citizen can do to help your local law enforcement agencies.

At the present time, a huge volume of suspected drug-related information pours into the Narcotics Bureau on a daily basis. The majority of this information is unorganized, unconfirmed, and usually ignored by law enforcement. Many callers feel discouraged or annoyed by the experience of volunteering information which no one considers important enough to act upon, and tend not to volunteer further information in the future. Both the callers and the police agencies agree that the actions reported are probably drug-related, but the police maintain that the information is usually insufficient enough to warrant further action. This is the point at which friction between law enforcement and the public begins.

In an attempt to explain one small part of the overall problem of drug



enforcement, a short history lesson is necessary. America was founded by persons fleeing restrictive European governments. Those governments exercised the authority to enter homes and subject persons and their property to unreasonable searches and seizures without due process. When the Founding Fathers convened and formalized our Constitution, one of their foremost considerations was the idea of being secure in their persons and property. Thus, the conviction that "a man's home is his castle" became a popular and enduring ideal. This attitude continues to be a vital law issue today, and "a man's castle" cannot be breached without

judicial due process, except in rare and very specific instances.

However, this conviction is the source of many of the basic problems currently confronting narcotics enforcement agencies. There are those individuals who say this is merely the price we pay for living in a "free" society. Some consider it the other side of a double-edged sword. For it is this very protection from unreasonable searches and seizures that guarantees the criminal element opportunities to exploit and protect their covert activities.

Accompanying this article is a form designed to assist you in obtaining the basic information necessary to initiate a

narcotics investigation. It is of the utmost importance for you to understand that you are not a police officer, nor are you an agent of the police. Do not place yourself in jeopardy when attempting to complete this form. Obtain only as much information as possible without arousing suspicion. Remember, successful investigations require time. Don't rush to complete the form in one day. Take your time and compile the most complete package possible.

In completing this form, there are several sections that are crucial. Without sufficient information in these sections the probability of an investigation is remote.

**Address** — The most basic bit of information is, in fact, the *correct* address. In the past, many embarrassing and sometimes tragic blunders have been made by search teams bashing

down the door to the wrong house. In addition to the street numbers, a complete description of the house helps to eliminate any mistakes. Note any modifications in the form of fortifications to doors or windows which would hinder a search team's entry into the house.

**Vehicles** — Obtain license numbers of all the vehicles of the actual occupants of the house. It isn't extremely important to us, as investigators, to have the license numbers of all the cars that come to the house and stay five or ten minutes. Attempting to obtain all those license numbers greatly increases your chances of being discovered by the suspects. Complete descriptions of the occupants' cars saves hours of surveillance and provides information that can be searched through our criminal computers in a matter of minutes.

**Names of Occupants** — Complete

names, and any nicknames, of the occupants of the house are very important. This may be the most difficult information to obtain, but, if the information explained above has been noted, not the most necessary. Give as complete a physical description as possible of all occupants.

**Children** — Because children living in a drug environment are also victims, it is important we know how many are in the house and their approximate ages. We can then take appropriate measures to assure their safety, should a raid take place. If we know there are very young children in the house we can arrange for their care and transportation before the raid occurs. This lessens the traumatic impact, especially if the raid can be scheduled while they are in school.

**Weapons** — Police officers *always* assume drug offenders are armed with

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## ABOUT THE COVER

This year's cover of *The Deputy* Special Edition magazine is a poster drawn by Oanh Truong, a student at James Rutter Middle School in Sacramento. Her idea of "A World Free of Illegal Drugs" portrays various cultures from throughout the world freeing themselves from and disposing of illegal drugs.

We would like to extend our thanks to Joyce Wright, Ed.D., Art Director of the Sacramento County Office of Education, for her invaluable help with the cover drawing contest. This would have been an impossible task without her assistance.

We believe that with continuing education and proper leadership America's youth will embrace the idea of and fight for "A World Free of Illegal Drugs."

Sergeant David E. Grant  
Sacramento County Deputy Sheriffs' Association

some type of weapon, and in the majority of cases this assumption is correct. In many instances, highly sophisticated military assault weapons, designed with the sole purpose of killing people, are discovered in drug raids. The mental condition of drug offenders is frequently unstable and highly volatile. To have these weapons in the hands of abnormally paranoid and easily agitated individuals can lead to tragic results for officers, offenders, and innocent bystanders. Any information regarding weapon types, numbers and locations is vitally important.

**Dogs** — To avoid "rip-offs" from rival competitors and arrests by the police, more and more drug dealers are using vicious guard dogs to protect their drug houses. Describe the type, size, color and location of all dogs or other exotic animals at the suspects' location.

Please remember that the most important point of this article is that you are not a police officer or agent of the police, and therefore should not place your safety in jeopardy in attempting to obtain any of this information.

Remember also that completing this form does not guarantee any investigation will be initiated. It will, however, provide a useful source of intelligence for future consideration and possible investigation. ★

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