

ROCK COCAINE AND CRACK

Crack, or rock cocaine, is today's most serious drug concern in the United States. This extremely addictive drug is cheap and easy to buy. Its potential for social disruption has become a media event complete with endless tales of personal tragedies. Since its first reported appearance in Los Angeles in 1981, it can accurately be referred to as a drug problem of epidemic proportions. Supplied by a 500 percent increase in the amount of cocaine smuggled into the United States from South America in the past several years, the spread of crack has overtaken rural as well as urban America. Its users come from all walks of life. From ghetto dwellers in New York to affluent professionals in San Francisco, crack spans economic and racial boundaries. Wherever crack gains a foothold, vicious violence among its users and dealers is not far behind.

Rock cocaine has turned the ghettos of many major cities into war zones run by unemployed teenage guerrillas who are frustratingly elusive to police and their efforts toward containing the problem. These teens are dedicated to violence, they are transient, and they are steeped in street savvy. Their ability to thwart narcotics agents is a well-known fact. Many law-enforcement officials feel containment efforts, especially in the area of undercover operations, are futile. A veteran officer of the Los Angeles Police Department reports they are losing the war against crack and feels that the answer to this crucial problem "has to be something other than what we are doing."

Crack represents an incredible magnification of the addictive properties of cocaine and provides

a marketing bonanza to crack dealers. It is usually sold in small chips that provide the user with an intense high lasting from five to 20 minutes. When smoked, the cocaine molecules reach the brain before 10 seconds has passed. However, the euphoric high is followed by acute depression. This cycle of ups and downs helps contribute to crack craving, and in some instances

cocaine, it was found that all died of convulsions within five days. These primates preferred cocaine to life, and many doctors have found close parallels of this behavior in human addicts.

In comparing the effects of crack with those of heroin, many experts are convinced that crack is much more destructive. Heroin users shoot up once or twice a day,



Materials used to manufacture cocaine into rock cocaine.

dependency can result in a matter of days.

What makes crack so dangerous is that the cocaine molecule works directly, through neurons, on the pleasure center of the brain. It produces pleasure, and some drug experts are pessimistic that cocaine addicts can control their need for the drug. In a recent experiment conducted on monkeys that allowed an unlimited supply of intravenous

but a crack addict needs another hit within 20 minutes. At even \$5 to \$10 a hit, crack can be more expensive than heroin. Heroin, a depressant, provides users with a feeling of sleepy lethargy. But crack is a stimulant, and its users are jittery, paranoid and often highly visible participants in violent crimes.

The manufacture of rock cocaine is a cottage industry with



Rock cocaine packaged for sale.

minimal central organization and very little technology. It has evolved into a billion-dollar-underground economy, bound together by vast amounts of cash. Most of the cocaine from which it is derived is smuggled into the United States from Colombia or through Mexico. The Drug Enforcement Administration DEA, generally concerned only with major traffickers, has sometimes been at odds with local authorities who are trying to curtail crack's

wholesale distribution. More recently, cooperative relationships between the DEA and local task forces have been much more effective in targeting large-scale distributors and trafficking networks. Crack dealers are known to purchase as much as one to two pounds at a time, probably to avoid large-scale losses from police seizures. These cooperative effort of various law-enforcement agencies have recently confirmed that Los Angeles is the

crack distribution center for the entire western United States.

The spread of crack can be directly attributed to the wide availability of cocaine as well as to the inability of the justice system to adequately handle the results of cocaine use. Many law-enforcement agencies feel that the courts are far too lenient with drug offenders. A high-government official has indicated that "judicial gridlock" renders the risk of prosecution to be remote. This in itself encourages the illegal drug traffic.

Since crack exploded on the drug scene in early 1986, it has become a drug of choice in virtually every state in this country. Crack's easy marketability increased its rapid appearance in even the most rural areas and has created enormous profits for those dealers and distributors selling it. It has given rise to an epidemic of violence, spawned destruction and despair for those addicted to it, and created frustration and disillusionment for law-enforcement officers fighting the laws of supply and demand. It is impossible to predict how long this drain on our national wealth will continue. Whether we will find the solution to dealing with what may be considered one of the greatest problems of the 1980s is a dilemma that will continue to plague present-day America for some time to come. ★



Drugs, money and guns. A typical drug raid seizure.

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