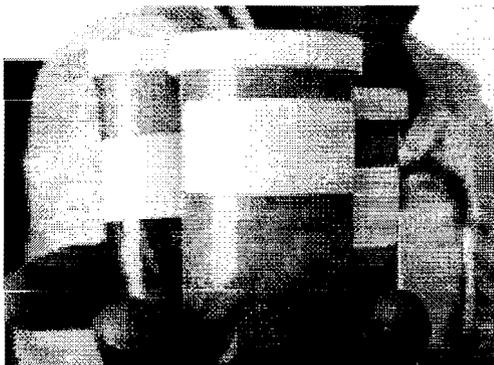


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# Oxycodone toll in Florida spotlights prescription drug dangers

By Ryan Jaslow



(Credit: iStockphoto)

(CBS/AP) Oxycodone is killing Floridians in epidemic proportions.

New data shows Florida's prescription drug deaths have increased nearly 9 percent last year compared to 2009 despite an aggressive crackdown by law enforcement officials.

Oxycodone was the number one killer, causing 1,516 deaths in 2010, compared to 1,185 the year before. Overall, there were 2,710 deaths in Florida last year caused by prescription drugs, compared to 2,488 in 2009. For the second year in a row, prescription drugs continued to outpace illegal drugs as a cause of death - there were almost three times as many deaths in Florida last year attributed to oxycodone compared with cocaine.

Gov. Rick Scott said Monday he believes stronger legislation and regulation, along with more police funds, is helping in 2011. Data isn't available yet but Scott hopes the numbers will start to decline. He signed a new law in June that penalizes doctors who overprescribe painkillers, tightens rules for pharmacies, and modifies a prescription-drug monitoring database by prohibiting pharmaceutical companies from making financial contributions to support it.

Florida has been a leading source for the illicit purchase of prescription drugs, with addicts and dealers from across the Southeast flocking to clinics for fixes.

Scott called this effort personal because he has a brother who has abused drugs for many years.

"Any of us who are parents are scared to death of our kids using drugs," Scott said. "I've had drug abuse in my family, and it's just devastating."

Gerald Bailey, Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner, said the new data continue to show a tragic trend.

"Be assured, our work is far from over," Bailey said.

Also Monday, officials presided over a court-ordered destruction of more than 148,000 prescription pills that were quarantined in South Florida following the declaration of a public health emergency.

Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi described the year-over-year increase in prescription drug deaths as "crushing." But, she said in a statement, "With our continued efforts I am confident that these reports will reflect positive changes in the future."

Besides its intended use of pain relief, taking oxycodone causes drowsiness, nausea, confusion, constipation, unconsciousness, coma, and it can slow and stop breathing. Drug-takers might develop a physical dependence, so stopping the drug requires medical supervision to reduce or avoid withdrawal symptoms like restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, cold flashes with goose bumps ("cold turkey"), and involuntary leg twitches.

More than 5 million Americans aged 12 and older took prescription pain-relievers for nonmedical reasons each year, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration.

The National Institute on Drug abuse has more on oxycodone.

