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Dealers likened to terrorists as war on drugs mounts

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Victoria's top drug cop has likened drug dealers to terrorists, saying they pose one of the biggest threats to community safety.

Assistant Commissioner Glenn Weir says the effects of drug harm should be taught in primary schools in a bid to change behaviours at an impressionable age.

Mr Weir, who holds Victoria Police's drugs and alcohol portfolio, said to free up the courts, low level drug users should be sent to treatment programs instead of magistrates' courts.

Internal police data shows 23,588 people were charged with drug possession offences between October 2017 and September 2018.

DRUGS FOUND AT PRIVATE SCHOOL'S CAMP

HOW TO SPOT A DRUG DEN IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

The data shows over the past five years the number of people charged with cocaine use jumped 218 per cent while those taking methamphetamine (ice and speed) jumped 144 per cent.

Mr Weir said when it came to drug traffickers the "gloves were off".

"People who deal drugs, particularly methamphetamine and amphetamine, they are akin to terrorists," he said.



A filthy clandestine drug lab. File image

“They are causing significant community harm motivated by profit. Terrorists are motivated by ideology, people who sell drugs are motivated purely by greed. They are a constant threat to the community akin to terrorists.”

Victoria’s summer festival circuit was marred by more than a dozen overdoses and more than 100 drug arrests, including the Rainbow Serpent Festival where police were pelted with objects.

Several traffickers aged in their teens and early 20s pleading guilty to charges stemming from the event.

DEALER JAILED AFTER FESTIVAL BUST

In a wide-ranging interview with the *Herald Sun*, Mr Weir said:

MUSIC festival promoters had been put on notice to “clean up their act”;

THE price of water and alcohol would be addressed when permits are given to festivals to stop more drugs being taken because they were “cheaper”;

SNIFFER dogs were being trained in emerging drugs;

POLICE would not legislate music festivals out of business, instead crack down on the rogue ones;

FESTIVAL promoters should wear more of the police costs as authorities say it’s time for taxpayers to stop propping up the lucrative events;

DRUG taking weaves a golden web through other crimes, including robberies, family violence and assaults; and

PILL testing was “nonsensical”.



The notorious Rainbow Serpent Festival, where drug arrests were made this year.

Mr Weir said graphic TAC-style ads were not the answer to drumming home the impact of drugs. He said primary school students needed to be taught early about illicit drug use, quashing the phrase “recreational drug use” at an early age.

“Illicit drug use is another risky behaviour. Be it drink driving, graffitiing trains as they are moving, jumping off rocks at Mt Martha. I think we need to start talking about harm and risky behaviour, as that’s what is needed to be addressed,” he said.

Mr Weir said he saw drug taking as a health issue that should be tackled in a similar way to mental health where people felt able to ask for help.

“If they can be diverted to a treatment to break that cycle, it is absolutely what we would prefer to see rather than clogging up the courts with low level drug offenders,” Mr Weir said.

But despite that, police still would not shy away from arresting people who possessed drugs.

As for those selling drugs, Mr Weir said there would be zero tolerance as they continued to put a hole in the drug market.

“The gloves are off, no compassion, no second chances for the drug dealer,” he said.

ICE THE SCOURGE OF VICTORIA

The increased use of methamphetamines including ice in Victoria is revealed in new police statistics.

The *Herald Sun* has obtained a breakdown of the illegal drugs officers have found on people.

The data shows police charged 5988 people for possessing methamphetamines between October 2017 and September 2018 — more than twice the number charged five years earlier.

Of those charged with possessing methamphetamine, ecstasy, cannabis, amphetamine, cocaine, GHB or heroin, an average of one in five were issued cautions or warnings, while the others mostly proceeded to court.

GHB and cocaine were two other drugs that have seen sharp rises in use in five years. Police charge more marijuana users with possession than any other drug takers.



The use of methamphetamines, including ice, is on the rise. File image

Assistant Commissioner Glenn Weir, in charge of Victoria Police's drug and alcohol portfolio, said in his 37-year policing career he was still amazed at the risks that people took with drugs.

"They make ill-informed, crazy and dangerous decisions to put themselves at risk," he told the *Herald Sun*. "They think they are 10ft tall and bulletproof — they are not."

This year at the notorious dance event the Rainbow Serpent Festival, seven people were admitted to hospital for suspected overdoses

GBL, which converts to GHB inside your body after being swallowed, was linked to almost 40 overdoses at the Electric Parade at Melbourne's Sidney Myer Music Bowl in 2017.

Only a month earlier, a bad batch of drugs led to three deaths and 20 overdoses, mostly in South Yarra.



New Year's Day revellers are taken away for a police search at Sidney Myer Music Bowl. Picture: Tony Gough

DRUGS, WEAPONS, CASH SEIZED IN SOUTHBANK RAID

POLICE SWOOP ON TRAFFICKERS IN DRUG BLITZ

Mr Weir said while music festivals put drugs in the spotlight, the illicit-substances battle was always being fought by police.

He said of music festival operators: "They need to have a greater awareness that they are making money off people and need to ensure as far as possible the environment is safe and as drug free as possible. Clean up your own act or you won't have one."

But Mr Weir added: "People need to take responsibility for their own actions. Festival operators can't be held accountable for every aspect."

Despite the deaths and constant messaging, some people just wanted to play Russian roulette with their lives.

"I'm really conscious this issue is not one that will go away," he said. "We need to challenge the use of drugs in the community. All illicit drugs are dangerous."

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