



## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

### NEWS RELEASE

PO BOX 004

CONTACT: Jayne O'Connor (Gov's Office)

Rita Malley

(609) 777-2600

Roger Shatzkin (Attorney General's Office)

Paul Loriguet

609-292-8580

TRENTON, NJ 08625

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## Gov. Whitman Cracks Down on Open Air Drug Markets

Drug dealers who sell their wares on community streets can expect that their open public shopping markets for drugs will be shut down, said Gov. Christie Whitman who unveiled the state's program to eradicate open air drug markets on the streets of Paterson today.

"We want to make sure that drug dealers stay off the streets and stay out of reach of people who drive into their neighborhoods for quick-fix drug transactions," Gov. Whitman said. "Our goal is to discourage casual and first-time users by cutting their access to dealers in hopes that they'll walk away from drugs for good."

The program, developed by Attorney General Peter Verniero and the Division of Criminal Justice focuses on neighborhoods that are sites for the open distribution of drugs. It calls upon local county prosecutors to identify the special markets and develop comprehensive plans to turn the dealers away from the streets and send buyers away.

A number of programs will be eligible for federal funding as part of the state's community policing grant program. In awarding the community policing grants, special consideration will be given to applicants that agree to establish and sustain a program to fight open air drug markets.

Prosecutors and local police departments are also encouraged to seek additional funding through public housing authorities and the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for police overtime expenses and to support the anti-drug initiative.

"These open drug markets degrade the quality of life in these communities and turn children and the elderly into prisoners in their own homes," Gov. Whitman said. "Dealers have turned walking to school, church or the corner store into running a gauntlet."

Some of the components of the initiative, which the Attorney General has named the Quality of Life program are:

- County prosecutors and law enforcement officials identify all locations where drugs are sold in the open and designate them as Special Enforcement Zones.
- County prosecutors and law enforcement officials develop a plan that specifies Quality of Life projects to be undertaken in their communities.
- County prosecutors and law enforcement assign Quality of Life teams to conduct patrols in the Special Enforcement Zones and maintain a visible police presence to deter open drug trafficking.
- Where appropriate, sting operations will be set up focusing primarily on users and purchasers.
- Law enforcement officials implement more stringent measures to enforce outstanding warrants, check license plates and seize vehicles of those who have purchased drugs in Special Enforcement Zones.
- County prosecutors and law enforcement officials monitor more strictly drug areas that have a high incidence rate of motor vehicle violations.
- Law enforcement officials impose stiffer penalties on those who engage in illegal drug activities in a Special Enforcement Zone.

"The Quality of Life Program is designed to force drug dealers and purchasers to abandon open-air drug markets that are essentially convenience stores where inexperienced drug users can readily purchase illicit substances," Attorney General Verniero said. "We will close down these open-air markets and street-level drug transactions."

Gov. Whitman throughout her administration has taken a number of actions to crack down on crime. The Quality of Life program is yet another example of her commitment to the war on drugs.

New Jersey's Comprehensive Drug Reform Act provides for some of the stiffest penalties against drug traffickers. She also increased penalties for distributing large amounts of marijuana and added new protections for police who are injured by booby traps set for them in drug dens.

The Governor has outlawed the use of ketamine hydrochloride, a veterinary anesthetic that is illegally sold in nightclubs and used by patrons as a hallucinogenic. She also stepped up penalties for the use of gamma hydrobutyrate and Rohypnol to facilitate a sexual assault.

Through her administration Gov. Whitman has enacted strong crime fighting laws such as: Megan's Law; Three Strikes; Joan's Law; the Law Enforcement Officers' Protection Act; and the No Early Release Act which forces violent criminals to serve at least 85 percent of their sentence.

Last months she signed a series of parole bills that will toughen standards for inmate release, limit the use of certain credits given to criminals, mandate psychological testing for some inmates eligible for parole and allow crime victims to testify during parole hearings

Governor Whitman also announced today that she will ask the Legislature to consider a law that would expressly authorize a judge to issue a restraining or "stay away" order to prevent a drug offender from returning to an open-air market neighborhood where that defendant has no legitimate business.

"We have added significantly to the arsenal of penalties that we can level against drug dealers," Gov. Whitman said. "Today, we're taking one more step in that direction and saying to our drug-pushing opponents: you won't infect our communities any longer."

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