

# **Governor Scott: Strike Force Winning Pill Mill War**

*Off the Streets: 200k pills, \$1.7 million in cash, 937 suspects*

**Miami, Fla.** – Governor Rick Scott and other law enforcement officials announced today that since the launch of Florida’s Statewide Drug Enforcement Strike Force in late March, law enforcement has made 937 arrests, including 17 doctors, and seized 252,410 pharmaceutical pills, 34 vehicles, 47 weapons and \$1,687,465. The Strike Force, led by chiefs and sheriffs from across the state, is targeting the major illegal distribution and supply points for prescription drugs.

Governor Scott was joined by Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner Gerald Bailey and State Surgeon General Dr. Frank Farmer in South Florida, the center of Florida’s prescription drug battlefield, to provide an update on Florida’s fight against prescription drug abuse and announce statistics from last year’s autopsy deaths which highlight the need to continue the fight.

“This is what is possible when we target the source of the problem: bad doctors at the top of the pill mill supply chain,” said Gov. Scott. “By attacking the problem at the source, Florida’s law enforcement officers have made a dramatic impact. I commend Attorney General Bondi, Commissioner Bailey, and all the sheriffs, state troopers and police officers who are part of this effort.”

New statistics from the Drug Enforcement Administration indicate a 17 percent drop in oxycodone purchases by Florida’s pharmacies and practitioners for the first five months of 2011 when compared to the first five months of 2010. Between January and May of last year, pharmacies purchased 236 million doses of oxycodone and practitioners purchased 35 million doses; for the same period this year, oxycodone purchased by pharmacies dropped to 225 million and the quantity purchased by practitioners plummeted to just 925,000 doses.

“Florida law enforcement has launched a focused attack,” said Commissioner Bailey. “We have major investigations open in every region of the state and we are systematically taking down pill mills, rounding up street traffickers, and putting overprescribing doctors out of business.”

Today the Strike Force began destroying the more than 357,000 pills voluntarily surrendered by physicians and quarantined by law enforcement as a result of the passage of House Bill 7095. The legislation declared a public health emergency and imposed new restrictions for dispensing selected controlled substances. The Florida Department of Health (DOH) issued 157 emergency suspension orders since the end of March, of which 49 percent involved the illegal dispensing, prescribing or use of prescription drugs.

In addition, officials today released the 2010 Florida Medical Examiners Commission Report on Drugs Identified in Deceased Persons, which contains information from the 9,001 drug-related autopsies performed by the state’s medical examiners during the last calendar year. The report indicates that prescription drugs continued to be found more often than illicit drugs, both as the cause of death and as present in the decedent. In 2010, 5,647 people died with one or more prescription drugs in their system. Of those cases, prescription drugs were the cause of death for 2,710 individuals, an 8.9 percent increase over 2009.

The report indicates the drugs that caused the most deaths were oxycodone (1,516), benzodiazepines (1,304 – with alprazolam, also known as Xanax, accounting for 981 deaths), methadone (694), ethyl alcohol (572) and cocaine (561). Oxycodone occurrences increased by 22.4 percent in 2010 and deaths caused by oxycodone rose by 27.9 percent when compared to the previous year.

“The severity of this epidemic cannot be overstated,” said Dr. Farmer. “DOH is committed to suspending and revoking the licenses of unscrupulous practitioners who inappropriately prescribe highly addictive controlled substances to patients, with the hopes of stopping countless senseless deaths in our state.”

The Florida Medical Examiners Commission 2010 Report of  
Drugs Identified in Deceased Persons is available on the FDLE  
website at [www.fdle.state.fl.us](http://www.fdle.state.fl.us).