

# Robbing pharmacies for pain pills: A nationwide trend in 2018

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ALTON – After dual robberies on Washington Avenue in Alton this week with the goal being prescription painkillers, many are asking how large of a problem opioid pills are in this region.

According to statistics from the Madison County Coroner Steve Nonn, as many as nine people died as a direct result from opioid painkillers in 2017 (not counting Fentanyl), which include hydrocodone and oxycodone. Two such deaths have already been confirmed to be due to opioid painkillers in 2018. When Fentanyl is added to that tally, however, as many as 24 deaths have been confirmed to have been caused in part with Fentanyl and 11 more are pending lab results. Those numbers include Fentanyl alone as well as in concert with heroin and meth.

It is not known by Riverbender.com if Fentanyl was any portion of the pills stolen from the robberies at the CVS and Walgreens pharmacies on Washington, but police did not indicate it was. Fentanyl is often prescribed for the very worst pains to people at the end of their lives.

Even without the f-word concerning law enforcement, healthcare professionals and addicts alike, prescription opioids are often the gateway drugs to harder ones, and often cause dangerous addiction by themselves.

These addictions can drive issues such as pharmacy robberies, which have been reported across the country in 2018. Eight pharmacies were robbed in Columbus, Ohio, through April 2018. Two men near Memphis were also charged with stealing \$44,000 worth of pills from a pharmacy on April 27, 2018. A man in a clown mask robbed a New York City pharmacy in May 2018 as well.

Alton Police Chief of Detectives Gary Cranmer told members of the media at least \$30,000 worth of prescription pain medication was stolen from the CVS during a Sunday, June 17, robbery, which occurred around 1 a.m. Police did not comment on the amount of drugs stolen from a similar robbery conducted at 3 a.m. Tuesday, June 19, which left the cashier from the Washington Avenue Walgreens in stable condition at a St. Louis hospital after the robbers used force.

When asked if this was part of a larger crime circuit or if they believed it thieves were trying to sell what they stole, Cranmer said police believe they are looking to sell the loot. Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons said pill bottles were found along Route Three near Hartford, which he said signaled the culprits were from St. Louis and took an alternate route due to bridge cameras being in place on the Clark Bridge.

Police are still looking for suspects in each robbery. Suspects from the Sunday morning CVS robbery were described as two black males in their early-to-mid 20s of slender-to-average builds. They wore dark-colored hoodies and one had dark jeans while the other had shorts. One suspect had a spider webbing tattoo on his left hand and fingers.

Surveillance images were released of the suspects believed to have perpetrated the Walgreens robbery. They were described as two black males in their mid-to-late 20s or early 30s who wore gray shirts and dark jeans. Each of them wore a hat, with one wearing a baseball-style hat and the other wearing a light-colored fishing-style hat.

Information on either get-away vehicle has not been released at this time.

Anyone with any information on any of the suspects or either robbery is asked to call the Alton Police Department at (618) 463-3505.