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Friday

June 10, 2011

'Drug Terminator'

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Union County Sheriff David Taylor drops a load of confiscated narcotics into the incinerator.

Derik Vanderford photos/Times



Flames engulf confiscated and returned prescription drugs.

Added efficiency was the primary reason for massive amounts of drugs being burned Tuesday morning outside the Union County Courthouse.

Evidence storage space had become increasingly limited at the Union County Sheriff's Office.

"When we took office, evidence was jam packed, from the floor to the ceiling," said Chief Deputy Perry Haney.

Haney said evidence had piled up in that fashion in three separate locations at the sheriff's office, which made the task of locating it based on files and case numbers nearly impossible. Fire arms and narcotics were the bulk of the collection. A complete inventory of the evidence, which took two weeks, was conducted by SLED.

Sheriff David Taylor mentioned that all drugs were once taken from evidence storage to SLED in Columbia to be burned, but budget cuts — which have cut SLED personnel — have forced SLED to take only specified amounts at limited times.

This led the department to search for a way to destroy the evidence in-house, and an incinerator called Drug Terminator was purchased with grant

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Chief Deputy Perry Haney gives a look inside a bag of prescription drugs.



This bag of marijuana was one of many burned Tuesday morning.



A closer look at some of the drugs incinerated Tuesday.

money.

Drug Terminator is an incinerator specifically designed for safe and efficient disposal of confiscated drugs. Drug Terminator is wood fired and includes two high velocity electric blowers which create a cyclone of intense heat eliminating illicit drugs quickly and completely. The volume of material is reduced to an average of 1 percent ash.

Before the purchase of the Drug Terminator, confiscated drugs were last destroyed in 2005.

Taylor said the incinerator was used once in September 2010, and Tuesday was its second time of use.

Drugs were taken from their SLED-issued storage envelopes and wrapped in brown paper bags. Haney handed over the paper bags — one load at a time — for Taylor to place in the incinerator drop box. Taylor — who donned welder's gloves — then hoisted the steel box into the air, placed it in the blazing incinerator, pressed down on the release plunger and incinerated the material.

"There is very little odor because it's so hot, it incinerates almost instantly," Taylor said.

Drugs incinerated included marijuana, cocaine (in both crack and powder form), methamphetamine and prescription drugs including pills collected by the coroner's office as well as the 48 pounds of pills collected during Drug Takeback Day on April 30. The entire process — from the evidence room to the destruction — was documented by video.

"Six years of dope burned up in two hours," Taylor said.

Haney said the evidence stored has been reduced from three rooms to two, and reorganization is in progress. A refrigerator has been added for evidence

requiring refrigeration.

Haney said the department has also been destroying other evidence as much as possible without crossing the bounds of the South Carolina Preservation of Evidence Act, for which several county employees have undergone training. He gave an example of the destruction of counterfeit CDs and DVDs which occurred Monday.

"Rather than cause pollution and burn the plastic, we spread them out in the parking lot and ran over them with an armored car," Haney said. "Then we took it all to the recycle center."

Haney also pointed out that while some confiscated fire arms must be destroyed, others may be traded in to gun dealers — selected by the highest bid — for equipment such as vests, ammunition, holsters and leather goods.

"It saves the taxpayers money and clears the evidence room," he said.

The cleaning out of evidence storage will help the department expand its use of new Law Trak software which was implemented in February. The software provides a records management system which includes documents such as police reports, tickets and field interviews.

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NASDAQ	2643.73	↓ -41.14	-1.53%
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NYSE	8016.51	↓ -133.14	-1.63%
TSX Comp	13084.00	↓ -171.74	-1.30%

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"It's a huge amount of information," Haney said, as he printed a police report and compared it to those of the past. "Now that's what a police report is supposed to look like."

Haney also said the Law Trak system will keep track of evidence, and the department is in the process of making that possible. Union County evidence technicians Robbie Hines and Troy Brewington will tag evidence with bar codes, and when scanned, information will be displayed immediately allowing officers to know what the evidence is as well as the number of the bin or rack to which it belongs.

Haney credited recent department improvements to Taylor's leadership style.

"I have to brag on him; he will wear his jeans, roll his sleeves up and work," Haney said. "We have definitely upgraded and improved."

'Drug Terminator'

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