Police raided two more suspected pea-shake houses Friday in what is becoming the biggest crackdown on illegal gambling in Marion County in at least a decade. The raids in the 3300 block of North Central Avenue and the 1400 block of West Roache Street followed raids earlier this week at primarily card-playing operations on the Northside and Northeastside. The Roache Street site had also been raided in February.

"There's a concerted effort to go after all illegal activity," Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Capt. Chris Dahlke said. "Gambling is illegal. Many people want to call it harmless, but it does negatively impact the community."

Police on Friday continued to insist that the raids were not part of any special, new get-tough policy, but it has been years since so many raids have taken place so close together.

"We want to address community concerns and work to correct problems to allow citizens to enjoy the quality of life they deserve in neighborhoods throughout Indianapolis," said IMPD Police Chief Michael T. Spears in a prepared response to questions from The Indianapolis Star.

Mayor Bart Peterson couldn't be reached for comment Friday afternoon.

Metropolitan police seized guns, cash, equipment and records from the suspected gambling operations Friday during simultaneous raids at the houses on Central Avenue and Roache Street, which started around 10:30 a.m.

Twenty people have been arrested in raids across the city this week, and 89 people were cited with misdemeanors for playing illegal games of chance.

Police say the pea-shakes, also known as ticket houses, and the poker clubs are magnets for drug dealers, thieves and other criminal activity. Past raids of these establishments have resulted in arrests, but few establishments have been shut down.

This time, Spears said, the goal is to shut these places for good.
"I certainly prefer the concept of keeping locations involved in any form of unlawful activity closed as opposed to having to continually receive and respond to complaints, and we will work to do so," Spears said.

Gene Fowlkes, 45, grew up in the neighborhood where, authorities say, the Roache Street house has been running illegal games for years.

He said community leaders ought to focus their attention on drug houses and the abundance of liquor stores, which he says are taking parents away from their children. Those unsupervised children, Fowlkes said, go out and commit crimes.

"The ticket house is not destroying the neighborhood," said Fowlkes, a construction contractor and handyman.

Ticket houses offer hope to people living in poverty, he said.

"You can wake up with $5 and go to sleep with $500," Fowlkes said. "The lottery is OK because that is helping the city, but the city is not helping the community."

The pea-shakes are known for donating to churches, youth programs and food pantries in their neighborhoods. Politicians including state Sen. Glenn Howard, D-Indianapolis, have said police could better spend their time on other things, such as fighting illegal drugs. Howard couldn't be reached for comment Friday.

Fowlkes sees the city's crackdown on ticket houses as a part of a larger effort to boost property values and push lower-income black residents out of their homes.

"This place is five minutes from Downtown," Fowlkes said. "I don't know where they think the black people are going to go."

Pea-shakes have long been the focal point of racial strife in the community. They are in predominantly black neighborhoods and are frequented by black players.

Mmoja Ajabu, minister of social concerns for Light of the World Christian Church, said it is not fair that the lottery is legal while pea-shakes are outlawed.

"As a preacher, I do not support gambling. However, as a preacher, I do support fairness," Ajabu said. "If the city is going to allow gambling, when you talk about the lottery, they shouldn't stop the little man
from playing in the game. You want to jump on the little man, and the little man happens to be black."

Police, however, busted whites as well as blacks in raids earlier this week. Nearly all of the 63 people arrested or ticketed at the Indianapolis Pinnacle Club on the Northeastside on Tuesday were white, police records show.

Undercover officers have been covertly collecting evidence against the alleged gaming operations for months, Spears said, but a recent robbery prompted police to act.

When two robbers -- one armed with an Uzi-style automatic handgun -- stole more than $11,000 from the Pinnacle Club on March 6, Spears said, he and others in the department realized the gambling had to end before someone got hurt.

"Concern for those within the location who may have become victims of further armed robberies or violence caused us to move quickly to help prevent any future violence," Spears said.

Police kicked off this week's crackdown when they raided the poker club in the 3900 block of Pendleton Way on Tuesday.

The second raid this week came Thursday when police raided a carwash in the 100 block of West 38th Street that they say was a front for illegal card games and other forms of gambling. Four people were arrested and 17 others were cited for alleged illegal gambling and allegedly visiting a common nuisance.

Nine employees were arrested at the Central Avenue storefront Friday, and 10 others were cited for alleged gambling, police said. Police seized a revolver, a shotgun and $5,339.

On Roache Street, police arrested four workers and cited two customers for alleged gambling. Officers seized a handgun and $1,605.

Detectives also took business records during the raids, police said.

Derek Tow, 35, who lives about a block from the Roache Street house, said he was cautiously hopeful Friday that the business would finally close for good.
Pea-shake houses

A pea-shake house is a place where people go to play games of chance.

The games

Many Hoosier Lottery games are patterned after games that have been played in pea-shake houses for years, such as selecting winning combinations of three or four numbers, pull tabs and tickets. People pay 2 cents and more to play, and a winner can collect several thousand dollars.

The peas

The winning numbers are based on the numbers painted on "peas," which are like dice but with just one number, 0-9. The peas are shaken from a container at least four times a day at each house.

The houses

Indianapolis has about a half-dozen pea-shake houses. They typically are in old, inner-city residential or commercial buildings. The houses have existed in Indianapolis for decades.

-- Star research

Indy police chief speaks out

Here are excerpts from Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Chief Michael T. Spears' statement on Friday's raids:

Complaints: "The IMPD has received complaints about the distractions and problems alleged gambling locations cause within neighborhoods. These issues are of significant concern to area residents, and we share these concerns. Our goal is to remedy the problems reported by citizens and often observed by our officers. These problems include traffic congestion, noise, littering and concerns about public safety in general."

Community policing: "Officers involved in recent investigations and arrests are responding to the concerns raised by individual citizens and community organizations. The philosophy of community policing is to
learn the needs and concerns of neighborhoods, develop appropriate patrol and enforcement methods to be responsive, and work to correct problems so officers do not need to respond to a problem repeatedly."

Keeping them closed: "I certainly prefer the concept of keeping locations involved in any form of unlawful activity closed as opposed to having to continually receive and respond to complaints, and we will work to do so. Our enforcement efforts in recent days reflect this desire to respond to community complaints and work to eradicate illegal activity and enhance public safety."

Preventing violence: "The IPC (Indianapolis Pinnacle Club) had been under investigation for some time. However, a recent armed robbery raised our concerns about public safety. Concern for those within the location who may have become victims of further armed robberies or violence caused us to move quickly to help prevent any future violence."

"They are just havens for crime," Tow said.

Star reporter Will Higgins contributed to this story.

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You can't fight violent crime with a pea shake pea shooter
By: AMOS BROWN III
Indianapolis Recorder

Our metropolitan police have taken a major step to reduce Indianapolis' high homicide and violent crime rate, by raiding and arresting mostly whites playing poker off of Pendleton Pike and Blacks playing the Ticket or Pea shake houses in the heart of the hood.

This bold, daring action by law enforcement will surely put an end to the increase in murders and other dastardly deeds in Indianapolis.

Excuse my salty sarcasm in the first paragraphs, but if my prose sounded absurd it should given the absurdity of last week’s police sweeps against illegal gambling in Indianapolis/Marion County.

Aren't we all reassured that during a week those men's college basketball office pools for money was going on in nearly every office in town, (which is illegal), the police busted poker and pea
shakes, which are just as illegal.

I know poker, pea shakes and basketball bracket pools are illegal. But so are cocaine, marijuana and other illegal drugs.

None of last year's 153 homicides was caused by somebody robbing a pea shake house. None of last year's homicides or the ones in past years were caused because somebody left a ticket house mad and went home and killed their girlfriend, relatives or children.

Upset poker and pea shake players weren't what caused those fiends to massacre seven last year on Hamilton Avenue or thugs committing drive-bys. So, why was last week, bust gambling (except for college sports) week in Indianapolis?

For years the cops and community have known where the illegal gambling joints have been. But, they're not causing Indy's crime wave. Illegal drugs are a major contributor.

Just as the cops and community know where the gambling houses are, they know where the drug houses are.

We got complaints from the neighborhood said police about the gambling crackdown. But the community complains bitterly about drugs. Many of you reading this column know about a crack house in your neighborhood, where dealers are so brazen that drugs are dispensed like a fast food drive through.

Illegal drug houses are a major contributor to Indianapolis' rising crime rate; and the rise in killings. But when was the last time the men and women of law enforcement had a consistent, coordinated effort to bust drug and crack houses like they did pea shake houses?

Black folks aren't angry about the pea shake houses in their neighborhoods. They are angry about the drug houses in their neighborhood, bitterly complaining to police who, to the community, seemingly are doing nothing.

Black complaints on illegal drug activity go unheard.

If the metro police are going to be like McGruff and Take a bite outta crime then they need to get serious and take a real Bite outta crime and run the drug houses out of business. They're the ruination of our neighborhoods and community - not pull tabs and playing cards!