



Meth use continues to plague area

BY KIM LUTTRELL

ROSSVILLE—

When Monique Lusk of Rossville speaks of the effects methamphetamine has on a family; she speaks from experience. Lusk has a nephew who was addicted to meth. He has spent time in jail and is currently on probation.

"No one is immune," said Lusk, who is the local representative for Mothers Against Meth-Amphetamine or MAMA.

Lusk said, "People who are addicted need help, not judgment."

"We need mandatory drug rehabilitation for persons convicted of using meth," she continued.

Lusk showed a video by Dr. Mary F. Holley, the founder of MAMA, to open Tuesday's drug awareness program sponsored by the Rossville Community Organization. The video was entitled "Crystal Meth — They Call it Ice" it was a riveting presentation by Holley on the effects of meth on the human body. The video was made more poignant by Holley's frank discussion of the meth addiction and eventual suicide of her brother.

In her video Holley told of some of the signs of meth use. Rapid weight loss, sweating, body odor, bad teeth and scars/open sores. Holley said meth is the most addictive drug on earth. She went on to describe how meth disrupts brain function and can cause the user to hallucinate.

After the video, Rossville Police Chief William Shannon spoke to the audience of nearly 80 people who showed up for the awareness program at the Rossville-Alvin Grade School gym. Shannon told the audience his department is ever diligent in watching for suspected meth activity in the community.

"We are making an effort to be more aggressive," Shannon said. "We are investigating every lead that we receive."

In response to an audience question concerning recent house fires being started as a result of meth manufacturing, Shannon said the state fire marshal had investigated, but no results have been returned.

Sergeant Tim Drake and Deputy Pat Alblinger of the Vermilion County Metropolitan Enforcement Group made a presentation to the audience. Drake is an 18-year veteran of the Illinois State Police and is on assignment with VMEG. Alblinger is a 14-year member of the Vermilion County Sheriff's Department and also is on assignment to VMEG. They are two of the eight members of the VMEG force.

"It takes only \$100 worth of ingredients to make a batch of meth," Alblinger told the crowd.

"Vermilion County has seen a rapid increase in meth manufacturing," Alblinger said. "In 2000 there were no meth labs in Vermilion County, by 2004 there were 130 labs seized."

"At one point we ranked No. 2 in the state," Alblinger said. "So far this year we have seized only two meth labs."

Alblinger said the downturn may be due to the new requirement of keeping pseudoephedrine behind the counter and the limiting of only two packages per person.

"It is one of the key ingredients in the "cooking" or manufacturing of meth," he added.

Alblinger said the main ways to take meth is inhalation, injection, ingestion and to snort it. He called meth dangerously addicting.

"All it takes is one or two times using meth, and you can be addicted," said Alblinger.

Alblinger went on to describe the things needed to make meth. They include the pseudoephedrine, anhydrous ammonia, lithium batteries, ether, drain cleaner, rock salt and camping stove fuel. He said all of these ingredients, except the pseudoephedrine and anhydrous ammonia, are readily available.

Some of the other items needed to "cook" meth are coolers to keep the anhydrous ammonia in, mason jars, rubber gloves and coffee filters for straining the meth.

He said if you come across a suspected meth lab or see some of these items discarded along a country road or left on isolated property that you should call 911 so someone can come identify them and dispose of them properly. Alblinger said these items could be contaminated and considered hazardous material. Other items to watch out for are duffel bags and backpacks.

Alblinger said a meth lab can be set up in the trunk of a car, motel room, homes, apartments and farm buildings. He said there will be a definite chemical odor as well as the possible smell of ammonia. He advises anyone who suspects such an operation going on to call 911 or VMEG at 443-1466.

Before he finished his presentation, Alblinger said there are children from 10 to 12 years experimenting with tobacco, alcohol and marijuana. These are gateway drugs. Once they start down that path it is just a short step to more dangerous drugs like meth.

The program concluded with Vermilion County State's Attorney Frank Young speaking to the audience about the courts and meth offenders.

Young told the audience, "Given what the drug can do, it can cause a person to lie, steal or rip off even the closest friend or relative to them in order to get bail to get back on the street to get more meth."

Young said when he took office in 2000 there were about 200 drug cases a year, now there are 600 drug cases a year. He said if a person is arrested on a meth charge and posts bond it is likely they wouldn't go to trial for 120 days.

He urged the audience to not sit back and do nothing.

"Call police, take pictures, your eyes and ears are going to be the difference in stopping this," said Young.