"Meth awareness campaign begins"

12/16/06- The State Journal-Register (IL)

A new public awareness campaign to target methamphetamine abuse in central and southern Illinois was announced Friday by the office of U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

The campaign, consisting of billboards, television and radio spots, is being done in cooperation with the Illinois Sheriff's Association and the Illinois Broadcasters Association.

Earlier this year, Durbin asked the University of Illinois to gather and analyze data on how meth is affecting the state, and to look at strategies for fighting back. The data suggests that most victims are poor, white adults in rural areas who have less education than the average Illinoisan.

Male meth abusers outnumber women by about 12 percent, but for most street drugs, male abusers outnumber women by closer to 50 percent.

The hold on women has major implications for children, families and their communities, according to Durbin.

According to a press release from Durbin's office, about 1,700 women with children and 115 pregnant women entered public drug treatment centers in Illinois last year.

In 2004, more than half of the children entering foster care in some areas of rural southeastern Illinois were forced into the program because their caretakers were meth abusers.

Last year, Illinois State Police encountered nearly 1,000 meth labs, more than double the number uncovered in 2000.

In 1997, police found just 24 meth labs.

"The University of Illinois report speaks to the role of media and the value of a growing community awareness in turning the tide against meth use," Durbin said in the release. "... We know that awareness campaigns can help shape attitudes and spark conversations. These are not quiet ads. Our hope is that these ads will make people think."

The campaign will include more than 200 billboards in counties south of Interstate 80, with a focus on counties south of Interstate 72.

The television ads, intended to run after 7 p.m., will include the Springfield market.