



Wilson touts Illinois Meth Project expansion

By Mona Sandefur
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Benton, Ill. - Franklin County Sheriff Bill Wilson said he is pleased with the success of the Illinois Meth Project.

"A number of us serve on the committee to combat methamphetamine use," Wilson said. "The committee includes Thomas M. Siebel, who founded the project that was first launched in Montana as the Montana Meth Project that focused on prevention.

The Illinois Meth Project is a large-scale prevention program aimed at reducing first-time meth use through public servicing messaging, public policy and community outreach, Wilson said.

"The advisory council has the support of Attorney General Lisa Madigan, Secretary of State Jesse White and Deputy Governor Louanner Peters, who all serve on the council," Wilson said. "Wendy Bailie, director of substance abuse services for Franklin-Williamson Human Services, and I are the only two from downstate who serve on the advisory council."

The project has expanded to incorporate new territory.

"Advertisements designed to prevent first-time methamphetamine use among teens in the Springfield, Decatur and Champaign areas began on Monday," Wilson said. "The four television, seven radio and three billboard ads are up and running, and are expected to reach a minimum of 70 percent of teens in those areas four times a week.

The Illinois Meth Project has also increased its advertising market to include the southeastern counties of Clark, Crawford, Edwards, Jasper, Lawrence, Richland, Wabash, Wayne and White counties, Wilson said.

"These nine counties have been heavily impacted by the meth epidemic," he said.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin secured \$200,000 in federal funding during the last fiscal year.

"The additional money gave the Illinois Sheriffs' Association additional resources to support this expansion into southeastern Illinois," Wilson said. "The project obtained private funding in addition to Durbin's \$180,000 during fiscal year 2006 to help kick off a meth prevention campaign in Central and Southern Illinois."

Greg Sullivan, director of the ISA, expressed gratitude to Durbin.

"This federal funding will make it possible for the Illinois Meth Project to significantly expand its fight against this dangerous drug," Sullivan said.

Madigan said the expansion is "great news for Illinois."

"The powerful message this ad campaign sends to teens truly strengthens our work to combat the

manufacture and use of methamphetamine in Illinois,” she said. “I commend Sen. Durbin and the Illinois Sheriffs’ Association for their leadership in obtaining funding, and I urge other civic and business leaders to join us in this ongoing project.”

Wilson said the additional funds would improve education.

“I believe that educating the public, especially the children, is key to attacking crime,” he said. “It is never too late to start. The money will further our push to encourage teens to never try meth — not even once. That is the message of the advertising campaign.”

Wilson said law enforcement officials, drug counselors and state legislators agree about the effect of meth.

“There has never been a drug as powerful, addictive, and quick to destroy lives and communities as methamphetamine,” he said. “Meth is the top drug of choice and is the number one drug problem in Central and Southern Illinois. The financial and social consequences of meth abuse are devastating, and meth is increasingly gaining popularity among Illinois’ most vulnerable: teens and young adults.

“Illinois ranks fourth in the country in terms of meth-related arrests,” he said. “Seventy-two percent of people in treatment for meth use in Illinois began using at the age of 17 or younger. The state spends approximately \$2 billion annually to combat meth use.”

Wilson said countless others, including Illinois State Rep. John Bradley and State Sen. Gary Forby, worked tirelessly to bring a methamphetamine treatment pilot project to the Franklin County Juvenile Detention Center.

“U.S. Congressman Jerry Costello announced that grant funding had been received through the U.S. Department of Justice Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Program in mid-February of 2006,” he said. “The grant was designed to fund up to 10 percent to expand the residential treatment services program offered at the detention center.”

During the Oct. 1, 2008, press conference held to update the public about the meth program, Bradley said he is still emotional about his part of the development of the pilot program to combat methamphetamine abuse.

“Gary Forby was sworn in as senator on June 16, 2003, and I was sworn in as state representative on July 18, 2003. We went together as a team to tackle one of the greatest crises facing Southern Illinois: drug addiction.

“The juvenile detention center was being under utilized,” Bradley said. “We put our heads together to make an idea work that was born at a critical time. We decided to turn part of the building into a meth treatment program and went to the House of Representatives and the Senate for money to create the program. No one had ever done that before. We had to fight to get the \$25 million dollars needed.”