



## Illinois Meth Project starts advertising blitz

By Matt Courter  
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Olney, Ill. - The Illinois Meth Project introduced new advertisements this week with the aim of preventing methamphetamine use among area teens.

Illinois Meth Project Executive Director Steve Mange is optimistic about the effectiveness of the state campaign, which began in central Illinois in February and has expanded to Richland and surrounding counties.

"The exciting thing is that this is a meth prevention project that has been proven to work," he said.

On Monday, the Project announced its expansion into Clark, Crawford, Edwards, Jasper, Lawrence, Richland, Wabash, Wayne and White counties.

The group stated that U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin secured \$200,000 in federal funding in fiscal year 2008 to give the Illinois Sheriffs' Association additional resources to support the expansion. The Illinois Meth Project secured additional private funding. Previously, Durbin secured \$180,000 in fiscal year 2006 to help start meth prevention campaign in central and southern Illinois, the group stated.

According to information from the group, the Project is a non-profit organization that implements a large-scale prevention program aimed at greatly reducing first-time meth use through public-service messaging, public policy and community outreach. As part of this, the group produces advertisements for TV, radio, billboards and the Internet.

Mange said the ads are "attention grabbing" and are aimed primarily at teens, who typically engage in a variety of media.

With the ads, Mange said, the group is attempting to reach at least 70 percent of its target audience at least four times a week, which he said is an ambitious goal by advertising standards.

The Illinois Meth Project was established by the Meth Project, a national non-profit organization headquartered in Palo Alto, Calif.

Mange said that the program has been effective in Montana, where he said it has contributed to a 45-percent decrease in meth use among teenagers and a 72-percent decrease among adults. He said there has also been a 65-percent decrease in meth-related crime.

Richland County Sheriff Andrew Hires said he has seen billboards along Ill. 130 for a while and thinks the effort to bring attention to the issue is beneficial.

“Personally, I think any awareness we can get is a good thing,” he said.

Hires said the added awareness, combined with law enforcement and legislation regarding the tracking of medication containing meth precursor psuedophedrine, has reduced methamphetamine usage in the county. Hires said the prevalence of the drug is down from five or six years ago.

Bea Gardner, who is involved in local youth drug-prevention efforts such as PALS, said education is the key in preventing drug abuse. She believes the effort will help.

“It’s nothing but a benefit for the community,” she said.

The Project’s campaign message, “Not Even Once,” is effective and to the point, Gardner said, noting that one time is all it takes for someone to become hooked on meth.

“It has major long-term physical consequences,” she said, adding that this was illustrated in one of the Project’s radio ads in which a woman described the toll the drug took on her.

“The more we get people educated about it, the better,” Gardner said.

For more information, visit [www.illinoismethproject.org](http://www.illinoismethproject.org).