



## On Your Side: Meth use costs taxpayers billions of dollars

*The Drug Enforcement Agency says it shuts down 20-30 meth labs each year in our region.*

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AUGUSTA---Earlier this month, investigators found a meth lab in an Edgefield County motel. Earlier this year, a mobile meth lab was found in a car. In Columbia County, 18 people have been arrested for meth-related crimes in 2010.

The Georgia Meth Project is bringing an aggressive campaign. It's being called the first of its kind in the eastern United States.

And our area?

"We know there's significant meth use," says Georgia Meth Project Executive Director Jim Langford.

And some of the younger generation is just now learning about the drug.

"Last day of school, (my oldest daughter) comes up to me and says, 'What's meth?' and I looked at her and I said, 'Where did you hear that?'" said Veena Pannu.

Her 11-year-old daughter heard one of the meth project's ads on the radio.

"Those ads are fantastic," she said. "It's like a jolt in their face going, 'OK, this is what's going to happen to me.'"

Says seven-year-old Mimi Dean of the ads, "Scary. They have like a lot of blood."

Outside of how it looks, what it costs could be scary too. The Drug Enforcement Agency says it shuts down 20-30 meth labs each year in our region, most of them in Richmond or Columbia counties. Each lab costs \$5,000 to \$10,000 to clean up.

According to the Rand Corporation, Georgia has spent \$1.3 billion on law enforcement, drug treatment, social services, and lost productivity from the use of meth.

Adds Langford, "All of this boils down to individuals and the impact on the individuals and their families. That human toll is one that doesn't show up in economics but it's one that we're dealing with every single day in these local communities."