Georgia Meth Project comes to Effingham County

Campaign tries to stop the first use of the highly addictive drug

Posted: May 8, 2010 - 12:19am

Jim Langford, executive director of the Georgia Meth Project, spoke to a crowd of nearly 300 on Tuesday night at Effingham County Middle School. The Meth Project is running a series of advertisements aimed at stopping that first use of methamphetamine. (DeAnn Komanecky/Effingham Now)

By [DeAnn Komanecky](#)

SPRINGFIELD - Efforts to stop the first use of a dangerous drug was on the minds of about 300 people who gathered Tuesday night at Effingham County Middle School to hear a presentation of the Meth Project.

The Meth Project is a nonprofit national organization started in 2005 and aimed at stopping the first use of the highly addictive drug methamphetamine.

Radio, television and print advertising are used and present a hard-hitting and realistic portrayal of meth use.

Begun in Montana, the project's public-education campaign is not a treatment program, but focuses solely on prevention, said Jim Langford, executive director of the Georgia Meth Project.

The Georgia Meth Project started this year over concerns about the growing problem in the state.

"Georgia is the third worst in the country as to the number of teen meth users," Langford said.

The project has prepared several television, radio and print advertisements with the message "Not even once."

The Georgia project recently released the results of a statewide survey looking at attitudes and behaviors toward meth.

The survey found 35 percent of Georgia teens see little or no risk in trying meth and 23 percent see little or no risk in using the drug regularly. Twenty percent of teens and 34 percent of young adults in the state reported meth is easy to get.

The report also showed many teens have a low level of disapproval of meth use, and 39 percent say their friends would not give them a "hard time" for using meth.

Effingham County is certainly no stranger to the problem of meth.

The high number of arrests, whether for the manufacture, distribution or possession of meth, has earned the county the unwanted nickname of "Methingham."

Sheriff Jimmy McDuffie said the county unfortunately has a lot of experience battling meth.

"We've tried very hard to combat our reputation as 'Methingham,'" McDuffie said. "We think we've made a lot of inroads on the meth traffic here. But the key is getting them to stop using before they even start."

McDuffie said the Georgia Meth Project is a great step.

"These ads are pretty intense and graphic, but I think they need to be so people can really see just what meth does to them. Our Drug Enforcement Unit has and will continue to take a proactive approach on eradicating meth out of Effingham County."

Just since January of this year, the Effingham County sheriff's deputies have arrested 20 people on meth-related charges.

Effingham isn't the only Georgia county with a substantial meth problem.

Langford told the crowd Georgia, specifically Atlanta, is now the distribution hub for the drug on the East Coast.

Meth Project officials, citing the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, report meth as the fastest-growing drug problem in Atlanta, Dalton and Gainesville with Atlanta cited by the DEA as a hub for Mexican drug cartels selling meth.

Effingham Family Connections and the school system helped bring the Meth Project to town.

Elaine Spencer, EFC's executive director, said the Meth Project may use Effingham County as a model based on the turnout for the presentation and the community's interest.

EFC will be taking the lead locally on moving forward with local activities for the Meth Project.

No firm plans have yet been made.

"This was just our first step," Spencer said of the meeting.

Spencer said hearing the kids ask questions about meth during the presentation was heartening.

Superintendant of Schools Randy Shearouse said the project is one step the school system can take for students.

"We know the use of meth is a significant concern in our community," Shearouse said." By helping Elaine Spencer bring the Meth Project to our county, we feel we can help."

Shearouse said helping students is a duty for educators.

"We feel as a school system we need to do all we can to prevent students from harming themselves," he said.

Spencer said one thing she hopes to do is run the graphic Meth Project ads on the screens during high school football games.

EFC also has recently applied for a federal drug-free communities grant of $125,000 per year.

Those funds can be used in the battle against alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs, Spencer said.

Meth facts from the Meth Project

-- Dopamine is the brain chemical that allows us to feel pleasure. Meth unnaturally raises dopamine levels to more than 10 times the amount caused by life's normal pleasures, including eating and having sex. In stimulating this dopamine release, meth creates an intense rush of pleasure. This powerful rewarding effect is a major part of the biology of meth addiction.

-- The crash - When meth users end a run of meth use, they experience "the crash." Severe fatigue, anxiety, depression and confusion occur, and meth craving is often strong.

-- Tolerance - As tolerance to meth develops, users consume larger doses, take meth more often and change methods of use. Tolerance contributes to many of the negative consequences of meth use. Because people need more meth to get high or even feel normal, they need more money to buy it.

-- Psychosis - Most people who use meth in extended binges hear voices and see things during those binges. These hallucinations lead to extreme anxiety and paranoia. The combination of hallucinations and feelings of fear and paranoia is known as meth-induced psychosis. In some severe cases, the symptoms can persist for days. In a very few cases, meth-induced psychosis can be long-term and possibly permanent.

-- Aggression - Meth stimulates the emotional center of the brain (the amygdala). The longer meth is used, the more sensitive and hyperactive the emotional center of the brain becomes.

Source: georgiamethproject.org