

Anti-meth campaign uses graphic ads to warn teens

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Augusta-area police say they support a hard-hitting ad campaign aimed at keeping teens from using methamphetamine.

The Georgia Meth Project -- which debuted Monday on the steps of the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta -- is designed to flood media with ads featuring graphic and startling images of teenage users.

Across a wide array of formats, the campaign will feature Georgia teens talking about their experiences using the highly addictive stimulant.

Lt. Robert Partain, of the Richmond County Sheriff's Office Narcotics Division, said any campaign that shows the effects on the users' bodies and lifestyle is a powerfully effective deterrent.

"I think the campaign will hopefully target the user market, and it will deter some," Partain said.

Locally, he said, the meth trade has been building over the past several years.

Since Jan. 1, Partain said, his office has discovered five meth labs in the Augusta area. They typically produce only a small amount but are extremely dangerous because of harmful fumes from the production. They can explode, making them hazardous to surrounding homes.

In one radio ad, 19-year-old addict Andrew describes his parents' shock after he tried to hang himself.

"They were devastated seeing their baby boy hanging from a tree, lifeless, with his tongue hanging out of his mouth," the ad said.

A print ad shows a dirty bathroom with the words, "No one thinks they will lose their virginity here. Meth will change that."

Jim Langford, the executive director of the Georgia Meth Project, said the ads were developed with the help of teenage focus groups and Hollywood producers.

"Yes they are graphic, but to cut through all the other messages kids see out there, they really

have to be," he said.

Officials say Georgia ranks third in the U.S. in past-year meth users between ages 12 and 17.

Last week, a Family Dynamics Committee, which consists of community members and by state law must approve outside material shown to students, approved the use of videos from the project for students in grades six through 12.

Speaking at the debut Monday, U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson said the state's future was "being robbed by methamphetamine."

Georgia Attorney General Thurbert Baker said the use of meth must be stopped before it becomes an epidemic. The Georgia Meth Project, which was started more than a year ago, is modeled after a similar program first launched in Montana in 2005, which has seen a 63 percent drop in meth addiction among teens over the past four years.

Associated Press reports were used in this article.

Links:

[1] <http://chronicle.augusta.com/news/metro/2010-03-02/schools-combat-meth-use-videos>

[2] http://chronicle.augusta.com/stories/2010/01/19/met_563747.shtml

[3] <http://www.georgiamethproject.org/>