

Indiana is mired in meth epidemic

Despite the best efforts of law enforcement officials from around the state, Indiana remains mired in a methamphetamine epidemic. This outbreak is challenging law enforcement agencies, forcing hundreds of children into the child-protection system and filling up county jails across the state.

We have a long way to go in combating methamphetamine production and abuse. But, good news came this week with an announcement that efforts by the Daniels administration to combat these problems appear to be working.

Since March, when Gov. Mitch Daniels announced his first meth initiatives, drug lab seizures have decreased dramatically. For example, between July and September, compared to the same three months in 2004, the number of meth labs seized by Indiana State Police declined 32 percent (243 to 166). In September, 53 labs were seized, compared to 90 a year ago, a 41 percent reduction.

The drug-testing backlog at the Indiana State Police forensics lab has been cut by nearly half. The backlog was 8,413 in February; it has been reduced to 4,404 as of September.

Last spring, the General Assembly passed the Meth Prevention Act (SEA 444) — an effort to limit the access of drug dealers to the key ingredients necessary to make methamphetamine: ephedrine and pseudoephedrine.

Because these ingredients come from commonly used cold medications, the basic materials necessary to cook meth can be bought legally and cheaply at almost any discount convenience store.

In response to this dilemma, SEA 444 places a few common sense requirements on stores that sell certain cold medicines.

SEA 444 now limits sales of drugs



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pseudoephedrine products per week.

These measures may inconvenience some, but given the scope of our statewide problem, most law enforcement experts believe the small inconvenience is worth it. In fact, these steps have proven to work in reducing meth problems in other states. After implementing similar legislation, Oklahoma experienced reductions in its meth lab seizures by more than 80 percent in the first year.

In addition to signing the Meth Prevention Act, Daniels has launched an aggressive Meth Prevention Initiative.

This spring, the Department of Child Services developed a protocol for children removed from meth houses.

The program, Indiana's Drug Endangered Children Protocol, is being used as a model by at least one other state. In conjunction with this program, the state has paid for disposable emergency blankets to be wrapped around children when they are removed from homes containing meth labs.

In April, the Department of Corrections launched the first meth-only treatment program in the country at the Miami Correctional Facility. The 204-bed treatment facility is already showing results,

containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine to those 18 or older, and requires purchasers to show a photo ID and sign a log book. No customer may purchase more than 100 tablets of ephedrine or

with 22 inmates completing the Clean Living is Freedom Forever (CLIFF) meth rehab program just this week.

These efforts have now expanded to the Wabash Valley Correctional Facility and the Rockville Correctional Facility, which is the first unit in a women's prison in the country.

The department plans to open a unit at a juvenile facility yet this year.

Also, this week, the governor announced that he will host leaders from 13 states in December for the first Midwestern Governors Association Regional Meth Summit.

Governors, agency heads and policy leaders will be invited to the Dec. 13-15 event in Indianapolis that is being coordinated with the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Later this year, the administration intends to launch the Indiana Meth Watch Program to educate retailers and the public about the dangers of meth production. Efforts also continue at developing an environmental cleanup and remediation program to deal with abandoned meth labs that cause severe contamination from the hazardous materials used in manufacturing the drug.

As I have said before in this column, in the long run, we need to attack this problem from all angles, including addiction treatment, public education and increased criminal penalties.

Gov. Daniels is working in that direction, with a long-term strategic plan that details specific actions to combat methamphetamine abuse and measures our progress toward results.

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