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Meth Project touts survey, unveils more meth ads

By JESSIE L. BONNER - Associated Press Writer

A gritty advertising campaign launched two years ago against methamphetamine use is hitting its targeted audience as more teens become aware of dangers linked to the drug, members of the Idaho Meth Project said Tuesday.

The group released a survey taken of more than 3,000 teens and young adults across the state late last year, reporting larger numbers believe there is great or moderate risk in trying the drug just once or twice compared to 2007.

The survey found 82 percent of teens believe there is great or moderate risk in trying the drug once or twice. That's up from 77 percent two years ago, when the campaign was launched with disturbing commercials and billboards.

The 2009 poll found increased awareness among young adults too, with 78 percent reporting they believe there is great risk in trying methamphetamine once or twice, compared to 68 percent of those surveyed in 2007.

The group also unveiled more graphic television, radio and billboard ads, focusing this time on the harm users of the drug may inflict on family and friends.

"We knew from the beginning of this campaign it was going to require an ongoing effort," said Idaho Meth Project Executive Director Megan Ronk.

One commercial shows a teenager selling his girlfriend for sex to get money for meth and in another, a boy hits his mother. The television ads were directed by Darren Aronofsky, director of movies "The Wrestler" and "Requiem for a Dream."

The new campaign includes four commercials for television, four advertisements for print media and six for radio. Two of the radio spots are in Spanish, project officials said.

The Idaho Meth Project started to target minority groups last year, airing radio ads in regions where the state's Hispanic population is concentrated. The effort was modeled after a similar one made by the Arizona Meth Project.

The project also began reaching out to American Indians, a strategy used by the Montana Meth Project and commended by the Crow Tribe for addressing an issue that has become a big problem on many reservations.

The first campaign was announced in 2005 when the Montana Meth Project started with a \$20 million donation by billionaire businessman and rancher Tom Siebel. The project has since been replicated in six other states, including Arizona, Idaho, Illinois, Wyoming, Colorado, and Hawaii.

The Idaho campaign was launched in January 2008, when the state was ranked fifth in the nation for meth use. That number has dropped slightly since the campaign began, to seventh place.