Associated Press

Associated Press
Idaho Meth Project targets minorities
http://www.theolympian.com/northwest/story/971722.html
September 15, 2009

The Idaho Meth Project is targeting minority groups more than a year after the campaign was launched to steer teens and young adults away from methamphetamine through graphic TV, radio, print and billboard ads.

The Idaho campaign says it is discussing working with tribes to reach 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.

Idaho Meth Project Executive Director Megan Ronk also said that early this year the group began airing ads on Spanish-language radio stations in regions where the state's Hispanic population is concentrated.

The effort was modeled after a similar one made by the Arizona Meth Project, Ronk said. "They felt radio had been probably the most valuable media format to be able to reach that community," Ronk said.

The Idaho Meth Project is a gritty campaign aimed at persuading young people to avoid the drug with the slogan, "Not even once."

The project began gearing its message toward the state's Hispanic population after alarming statistics from a 2007 survey of high school students were released, Ronk said.

The Idaho Youth Risk Behavior Survey, compiled every two years by the state Department of Education, showed 14 percent of Hispanic students said they had used meth one or more times. That's compared to 5 percent of white students.

"When you take a look at that, it certainly suggests paying attention to the Hispanic community," Ronk said.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates Hispanics make up about 10 percent of Idaho's total 1.5 million population.

They are concentrated in the southern half of the state, according to analysts, especially in Canyon County and Twin Falls County -- areas where the Idaho Meth Project started running ads on Spanish-language radio stations in January.

The campaign combed the state last year looking for young people -- former meth users and those in recovery -- to tell their stories. About 70 interviews were completed and of those, about 10 percent were in Spanish, Ronk said.

The Idaho Meth Project hosted an educational event for the Hispanic community last fall and again this month in Nampa.

Community action events are part of the national Meth Project's three-pronged approach to combating first-time meth use, said Chris Rose, vice president of development for the Palo Alto, Calif.,-based Meth Project Foundation.

"We're constantly trying to expand our reach to teens," Rose said.

The campaign kicked off 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. Idaho is now seventh.