

Idaho Meth Project launches in-your-face ads Officials, who hope Idaho's project is as successful as Montana's, are targeting teens with ads on TV and even in high school newspapers

January 11, 2008

By: Bethann Stewart

The Idaho Meth Project is about to hit home – with a sledgehammer. Gov. Butch Otter officially unleashed the campaign Monday during his State of the State address.

The in-your-face ads are making their way around the state – on TV and radio, in local and high school newspapers and on billboards – targeting 12- to 17-year-olds.

"We have to get them before they get into a situation where they can use meth for the first time," said Megan Ronk, executive director of the Idaho Meth Project. "Meth is so powerful. There's a 95 percent chance that if you use the drug once, you'll use it again."

Print ads also will run in 24 high school newspapers across the state, Ronk said.

Meridian High School's student newspaper is one of them.

Bekah Lloyd, 16, an editor at the newspaper, played a key role in getting a Meth Project ad in her paper. She sees the effects of meth all over her community, she said, and she sees kids in school who use meth.

"The first time I saw (the ads), I was just in shock," she said. "I thought: This can't be real. Then I started looking around, and things started to make sense. I don't want that to become what Idaho is."

The ad will appear on Feb. 1, in the next edition of the school newspaper, she said.

Ada County Sheriff Gary Raney said meth has been the greatest catalyst of major crime in Idaho.

"If I could wipe out the effects of methamphetamine at one moment in time, I could close half of Ada County Jail tomorrow," he said.

Curbing meth use isn't free.

Idaho fundraisers have been working around the state since about May to raise the \$2.6 million needed to pay for the ad campaign, Ronk said.

Because of donations from media outlets, that budget estimate may go down, she said. The project has \$1.6 million so far.

In addition to relying on private donations, the project applied to the Legislature for \$1 million in tobacco settlement money from the Millennium Fund.

Otter on Monday asked the Legislature to support the Idaho Meth Project.

Prior to the campaign's launch, the organization conducted a statewide survey of parents and kids to get a better understanding of their perceptions about meth, Ronk said.

About 3,000 kids from 51 schools were interviewed, along with 400 parents and 300 young adults age 18-24, Ronk said.

The project plans to release the results of the survey later this month.

In September, the organization will conduct another survey to help judge the effectiveness of the ad campaign.

"We will also work with state and local agencies to look at third-party statistics of meth-related crime," Ronk said.

The Idaho Meth Project is an exact replica of the Montana Meth Project, which began in 2005, Ronk said. The campaign was designed by billionaire and part-time Montana resident Thomas Seibel.

According to a survey by the Montana Office of Public Instruction, the number of high school students who said they had used meth at least once declined to 4.6 percent in 2007 from 13.5 percent in 1999.

"When you get that low, you're really drilling down to the at-risk kids," said Montana Attorney General Mike McGrath.

The Montana project also reported that in 2005 when the campaign started, the state ranked fifth in the nation in meth use. In 2007, the state ranked 39th. That bodes well for Idaho.

"If we can be as successful as the state of Montana, that's our goal," Ronk said.