

Karianne Fallow: Idaho Meth Project deserves support, especially from businesses

Letter to the Editor

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Idaho launches a major drug prevention program this month, aimed at combating the state's serious methamphetamine problem. Among the 50 states, Idaho now ranks fifth in the nation in per-capita meth use and has one of the highest increases in arrests due to methamphetamine.

Methamphetamine use is a problem with serious public consequences. Idahoans spend more than \$66 million each year to house male inmates who admit to having a meth problem. In public treatment facilities, 32 percent of adults are there due to meth, and 80 percent of children placed in foster care in Idaho each year come from homes where parents are addicted to meth.

The problem is also serious for companies like my own all across the nation. A recent study in Arkansas - Wal-Mart's home state - conducted by the University of Arkansas Walton School of Business revealed that meth use by employees causes increased absenteeism, lost productivity, increased turnover, increased employee theft, increased worker compensation claims and increased health care premium cost

In one Arkansas county alone, employees who used meth imposed an additional \$20 million to the cost of doing business each year. That's a staggering number, and there is no question businesses in Idaho are facing the same challenge. We agreed with Gov. Butch Otter and the first lady that meth is "a scourge to the state of Idaho" and we were happy join him in support of the Idaho Meth Project through a \$50,000 contribution.

This month, the Idaho Meth Project launches a saturation ad campaign to convey a clear and compelling message: Don't use meth, not even once

In powerful, research-based ads designed to educate anyone who might be tempted to try meth, the terrible physical and mental consequences of meth use are graphically presented. These ads are designed to reach a critical target audience of 70-90 percent of teens statewide, 3-5 times a week, with prevention messages.

These ads worked in Montana, where, after two years of this hard-hitting campaign, meth use among teens has declined by nearly 50 percent. Montana has also seen a 53 percent decline in meth-related crimes and a 50 percent decline in meth-related foster care admissions.

Those numbers helped to convince Wal-Mart that an Idaho ad campaign was a worthwhile investment. Every dollar invested in a prevention program with proven results will substantially reduce the long-term costs to the state and Idaho employers.

We at Wal-Mart encourage other business owners to join us in supporting this important effort. Given the enormous cost of meth abuse to the state and its citizens, and the costs to local businesses, we are certain this is a small investment with a big return. The Idaho Meth Project offers a proven prevention message that can help to eradicate meth use in Idaho. It's a message that all of us should step forward to stand behind.

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