

## Tell the truth: A \$12 million anti-meth lesson

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By: Cassidy Friedman

FILER - Idaho is bracing itself for a 10-year, \$20 million-plus war of propaganda against meth that paints the drug as menacing as the anti-pot advertising of the 1930s and 1940s portrayed marijuana.

But unlike "Reefer Madness," "Marijuana Girl" and cartoonists' depictions of beady-eyed demonic fiends, new media campaigns such as one Idaho will soon borrow from the Montana Meth Project, slam the senses with real images and stories of actual meth users.

"Anti-marijuana campaigns were based on fictions. They were trying to get the shock out there," said Brent Evans, drug-free workplace coordinator at St. Luke's Magic Valley Regional Medical Center. "But kids are smart."

The traditional drug ad, Evans said, entails an adult who has never tried drugs warning against its many ills.

So, Evans takes before-and-after photos with him to visit middle school and high school classrooms, and sometimes actual recovering addicts.

Sending moral warnings, as in Reefer Madness, and raising health issues, as in the infamous "this is your brain on drugs" TV ad featuring eggs sizzling in a frying pan, are not what kids voted for in Montana's \$12 million privately funded project.

"Kids told us - and they are our target population - having an adult stand up in front of them really doesn't work," said Peg Shea, executive director of the Montana Meth Project. "Kids in Montana really wanted to hear from other kids in Montana."

Idaho is raising \$2.7 million in private money to copy the campaign in Montana. In 2005, the Montana Meth Project bombarded newspapers, billboards and airwaves with graphic images and firsthand stories of recovering addicts aimed mainly at youth ages 12 to 17.

"It reaches a target audience better than more traditional forms of drug awareness could," said John Hanian, a spokesman for Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter. "They are actual kids talking about their lives after meth. We want to replicate that here because we have got lots of these stories in our



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state."

In half a month of fundraising, Idaho has raised more than \$276,000.

Idaho is scrambling to raise funds to import Montana's aggressive statewide media campaign that took Montana from ranking 5th for workers testing positive for amphetamines in 2005 to 39th in 2006, according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Idaho fell from 18th to 28th during that same period.

The Magic Valley has already produced several like-minded initiatives on a smaller scale.

Sharon Lutkehus has begun showing her seventh-graders at Filer Middle School a video produced by Dr. Mary F. Holley, the director of Mad Mothers Against Methamphetamine.

"High is a Lie" is a graphic, 40-minute video that centers on Holley's meth-addicted brother who, six months after filming, killed himself.

"There's a lot of shock on their behalf," Lutkehus said. "They are surprised at how quickly the addiction happens."

And also how hard it is to break, she added.

Evans said the only weakness of the video is that it was filmed outside Idaho.

"Unfortunately, in our society we see everything glamorized so much," Evans said. "We need to see the true downside of what meth is doing to our family, our friends and our community as a whole."

Western States College in downtown Twin Falls distributes its own video called, "Meth in the Valley," free of charge. And it is working on a sequel.

The organization's founder was out of state on a family emergency and unavailable Thursday. But Evans, who has seen the video, said it follows local meth users.

"It talks to our people here locally," Evans said. "When they see this they are not saying, 'Oh, that's Ohio.'"

When the statewide program arrives in Idaho, expect to hear the voices of addicted kids on the radio. However, the TV and newspaper ads will use paid actors.

"I have been in the business of substance abuse for nearly 29 years and I have never seen anything to this degree," Shea said. "Meth in Montana is out of the closet. In Idaho, like it was in Montana, many teens don't understand how ravishing this drug is. Absolutely, be totally and completely honest."