

## Drug traffickers' money to help fight meth use

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COEUR d'ALENE — Hey drug dealers, get caught in Kootenai County using money and cars to sell your illegal wares, and your assets will be used to help keep kids away from meth.

Major Ben Wolfinger announced Thursday that the Kootenai County Sheriff's Department is donating to the Idaho Meth Project 10 percent of all assets seized from drug dealers arrested in the county.

Kootenai County Sheriff's Department is the first law enforcement agency in Idaho to do this.

Wolfinger presented his department's first donation of \$5,458 to Gov. Butch Otter and First Lady Lori Otter during a press conference at The Coeur d'Alene Resort. The first check is just the start, Wolfinger said.

"We've got tens of thousands of dollars still in the system," he said.

Wolfinger challenged other law enforcement agencies in the state to step up and do the same.

The Idaho Meth Project is a data-driven, statewide prevention program aimed at reducing first-time methamphetamine use among 12-to- 24-year-olds.

The program is based on Montana's successful Meth Project program.

"The first lady and I decided this is what we wanted to do in Idaho," Otter said.

Prior to inception of the Montana program, that state had the fifth-highest meth use in the nation, according to federal Centers for Disease Control reports. Montana's ranking for meth use is now 39th in the nation.

When the Idaho Meth Project was officially launched in Idaho in 2008, the Gem State ranked sixth in the nation for meth use. The newest CDC report showing Idaho's new national ranking is not yet available, but other indicators show the program has been successful.

Between 2007 and 2009, teen meth use dropped in Idaho by 52 percent, according to the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

"We are very thankful for your attention to this problem in your community," said Lori Otter to Wolfinger.

The Idaho Meth Project now has 800 volunteers statewide, she said. They use commercial ads and educational literature and campaigns to spread the project's signature "Not Even Once" message.

"We need to keep fighting for that next generation," she said.

The governor and his wife also recognized the significant societal impact of reducing meth use.

The governor said that roughly one out of every 53 males in Idaho is somewhere in the justice system — either behind bars, on parole, probation, or reporting to law enforcement in some other fashion. He said 65 percent of those crimes have involved or have been motivated by meth.

Lori Otter said meth use further costs the state and taxpayers because it drives the need for treatment services and foster care.

In the Idaho Meth Project's first year, she said there were 199 permanent foster care placements related to meth use.

Assets seized from drug dealers by arresting law enforcement agencies are used mainly to pay for training and equipment. They cannot be used for personnel, said Wolfinger.

"Meth has been a huge problem in this area for 15 years," he said.

Public education and law enforcement crackdowns have reduced the number of meth labs discovered locally, Wolfinger said. But the drugs are now being imported into the county.

"We see a lot of it coming from central Washington," he said.

Wolfinger said his agency would like to reduce the demand for meth by educating the public about the risks of using it.

"It makes sense that money seized from drug dealers will pay for the prevention of meth use in Idaho," Wolfinger said.