

January 16, 2009



Meth-ods

TRUMANN, AR (KAIT) - The Trumann Police Department reported Friday a decrease in drug activity. According to the department's 2008 End of Year Report, drug violations were down 26.8% compared to 2007. The overall crime rate was down 2.74%. The city has been taking the fight against methamphetamine addiction to those who manufacture the drug. Trumann Police Chief Larry Blagg said his officers are seeing progress in the war on drugs, but methamphetamine users are still prevalent in Poinsett County.

"As far as meth labs go, the numbers were up at the beginning of the year of '08. Sometime near the beginning of February or March we started seeing a rise," said Blagg. Shortly thereafter, the state started using a new program called **LeadsOnlabs**. **LeadsOnlabs** is a program designed to help law enforcement officers track the purchase of pseudoephedrine, a key ingredient in meth manufacturing.

"All the items in this are still legal, so if you're not buying over quantities and you're not bringing attention to yourself, you know, once again, quantities and frequent purchases, you're not going to draw a whole lot of attention to yourself," said Blagg.



Blagg said **LeadsOnlabs** works when a person buys a product containing pseudoephedrine. If a person tries to purchase too much, then Arkansas State Police and local agencies are notified within 2 - 15 minutes.

Blagg said a person could face misdemeanor charges for trying to buy too much of the drug if investigated. Blagg said he'd rather pursue felony conspiracy charges, which carry a maximum sentence of 10 years in federal prison.

"When we found the connection, we started going after them for conspiracy. If they lived at the same address or were in the same cars or we know them to be a frequent purchaser, we can put it together," said Blagg.

By law, a person is not allowed to purchase more than 9 grams of pseudoephedrine every month. That's equivalent to 5 boxes of Sudafed 24.

"He came in here and wanted just one box of Sudafed 24," said Ken Gibson, owner of Gibson's Pharmacy in Jonesboro.

Gibson said a federal mandate, adopted a couple of years ago, and has drastically cut down on the number of meth addicts. Gibson said, however, he has to turn away people for trying to buy too much every day.

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"We have had to remove our Sudafed containing products from over the counter shelves, back behind the prescription counter," said Gibson.

"It would be people that we've had them from 80 years old down to 19, which is age limit. They come in and buy Sudafed," said Gibson.

"They monitor that on a daily basis, and I know they do, but as soon as I fill one, they'll know exactly who filled it and how much they got, what they got, and how much toward their limit were they," said Gibson. "It shows up on **LeadsOnlabs** where they tried to buy another box, and it would star that name to the state police saying that this person is a user."

Police agencies are trying to figure out a way to combat meth usage. Gibson said he believes making the drug prescription only would reduce the addiction.

"I have told the state police and legislators this locally and nationally, our legislators, that it needs to be prescription only. Sudafed is still a great product, works well on opening up the sinuses, and even I swear by it, but you're going to have to do it by prescription only or you're not going to curtail the use of methamphetamine at all," said Gibson.

"If it was prescription only, it would help a great deal, until they figured out another way to do it, either through the black market, getting it out of other countries like Mexico or somewhere and having it brought in here," said Blagg.

Police said meth is easier to make these days, but criminals, intent on making drugs, will stop at nothing to stay in business.

"If you've got 4 or 5 guys and they're recruiting 15 people to run out there and buy their limit of pills, then they have one central point they can meet at, then they can produce meth," said Blagg. "We may be pushing off on somebody else because these guys are cooking dope, they've got their minds set on it, if they're not in jail or mission or rehab, and they're going to be cooking dope."

Blagg said his primary job is to protect the people of Trumann.

"For what we have, and the manpower that we do have, and for the equipment we have, and the means that we have to use it, yeah, we do good," said Blagg. "We've been vigilant in not stepping back from it, you know, going after it as hard as we can, and the fact that they're coming out with this legislation and we're getting the chance to use it, they've given us the opportunity and we're taking advantage of it," said Blagg.

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