

Meth Project founder pitches effort

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By Noelle Straub

WASHINGTON -- Tom Siebel, founder of the Meth Project, and several Montana officials Tuesday urged leaders from across the country to establish the program in their states.

Siebel and Montana Attorney General Mike McGrath pitched the project at a meeting of the National Association of Attorneys General.

"The idea behind the Meth Project was to develop this into a replicable model," Siebel said, adding that he believes other states that have begun the program will see results similar to those in Montana.

McGrath told the group that Montana has seen a "dramatic turnaround, a dramatic change" in meth-related problems and that the project's advertising campaign was the most significant reason.

"There is no doubt in my mind that his program has saved hundreds and hundreds of lives in our state and has the ability to save thousands of lives nationwide," McGrath said.

Siebel also plugged the program to the National Association of Counties, which also was meeting in Washington. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., and Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., joined him there. Baucus also advocated more federal funding for drug task forces and law enforcement officials to help fight meth.

Siebel said five other states have already adopted the program: Wyoming, Arizona, Illinois, Idaho and Hawaii. He predicted that the Meth Project would be operating in 10 to 12 states by the end of this year.

Funding differs by state. In Montana, the program was privately funded for two years but is now funded in equal thirds by the federal government, the state and private sources. In Wyoming, eight foundations have chipped in for an annual budget of \$1.5 million, Siebel said.

Siebel said supporters of the program are pushing new ways to secure more federal funding. Currently the Office of National Drug Control Policy is required to spend 10 percent of its national media campaign budget on meth prevention advertising; Siebel said his group wants that increased to 20 percent.

Baucus's office has taken the lead on a \$25 million appropriation through the Justice Department's Community Oriented Policing Services or COPS program, Siebel said. And participating states have discussed asking for \$1 million to \$2 million earmarks to help them fund the program, he added.

Because meth is largely a rural problem, the Meth Project would not advocate running advertisements in Denver, Los Angeles or other large cities, Siebel told the attorneys general. The program takes at least two years to be successful and states should be committed to it for a decade if they're going to do it, he said.

Siebel noted that his program is focused solely on prevention and cited a slew of statistics on the improving situation in Montana. He said meth use has been cut by half in Montana and that the goal is to cut it in half again, and then one more time.