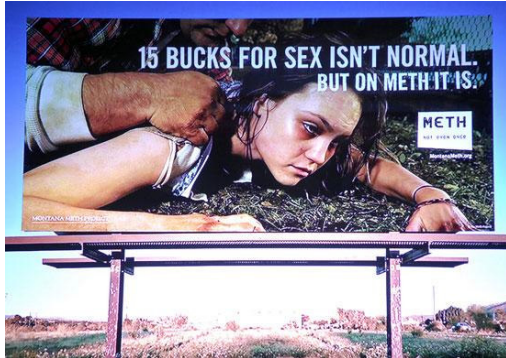


Ad campaign exposes deadly face of meth

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By: Angela Brandt



Eliza Wiley IR Photo Editor – A still image, from Phase Four of the Montana Meth Project advertising campaign, is shown on a billboard in rural Montana. In this ad a teenage girl offers herself for \$15 so they can acquire more meth.

The message is just as graphic, just as hard-hitting.

“15 bucks for sex is not normal. But on meth it is.”

It is one of the many slogans in the Montana Meth Project’s new onslaught of advertising, launched Tuesday during a press conference at the Capitol.

The billboard version shows a young, pock-marked, glassy-eyed girl selling herself for drug money in the grass next to a chain-link fence.

In the new television ad, a similar situation is depicted where two sisters are violated by a group of young men in order to get fund their habit.

“You can do anything you want to me for \$50,” a young girl tells two men, who then ask how much for her sister. The scene then cuts to the girls in a dingy bathroom with the men.

For it’s fourth phase of the Project, the nonprofit organization enlisted the help of filmmaker Alejandro González Iñárritu, the Oscar-nominated director and producer whose works include “Babel,” “21 Grams” and “Amores Perros.”

The latest campaign is based on the theme “This isn’t normal, but on meth it is.”

Dennis Taylor, the Project’s new executive director, said the ads are designed to “hit you right between the eyes.” Taylor said the one that really gets under his skin is the two sisters, especially because he has two daughters and has had five teenage foster daughters.

Gov. Brian Schweitzer cringed as he watched the new campaign during the press conference. “Let me just say those are hard-hitting. Did you guys all feel that? Wow,” he commented to those in attendance.

“I was gasping. I couldn’t breathe during some of those ads,” Schweitzer added.

Other ads show meth users breaking into people's homes and using violence to get money for the dirty drug. In all, three television ads, four print ads and nine radio ads will reach at least 80% percent of Montana teens three times each week.

Taylor said he hopes a change in attitude about the drug will lead to changes in behavior. Two recently released surveys show this trend is true in Montana.

"Methamphetamine in Montana: A Follow-Up Report on Trends and Progress" was released by the Montana Attorney General's Office this week. According to the report, overall meth use in the state appears to be declining. In particular, teen methamphetamine use is down nearly 45 percent since 2005, meth-related crime has dropped by 62 percent in the same period, and the number of employees testing positive for meth fell 72 percent.

Also on Tuesday, the Project announced the results of its 2008 Montana Meth Use and Attitudes Survey, which shows 84 percent of teens in the state now voice strong disapproval of trying meth once. In addition, 85 percent of teens said their friends would give them a hard time if they ever tried meth, which is a 7 percent increase from last year's survey.

The percentage of teens who have discussed methamphetamine with their parents is up 11 percent since 2005 to 65 percent overall in Montana. This is compared to 45 percent of teens nationwide, according to Project consultant Peg Shea, who is the former executive director.

When the Montana Meth Project first launched in 2005, the state was ranked fifth in the nation for meth abuse; two years later Montana ranked 39th.

Montana Meth Project is now branching out to five other states — Arizona, Idaho, Wyoming, Hawaii and Illinois — to be used as a template.