

## *A Comprehensive Community Approach to Methamphetamine Prevention*

By Kathy Valdez

Methamphetamine can feel like a “larger than life” issue and trying to address the problem can feel even more overwhelming. That is why it is so important to approach the problem from a variety of fronts and with an arsenal of tactics. As with any good prevention effort, the approach must be comprehensive.

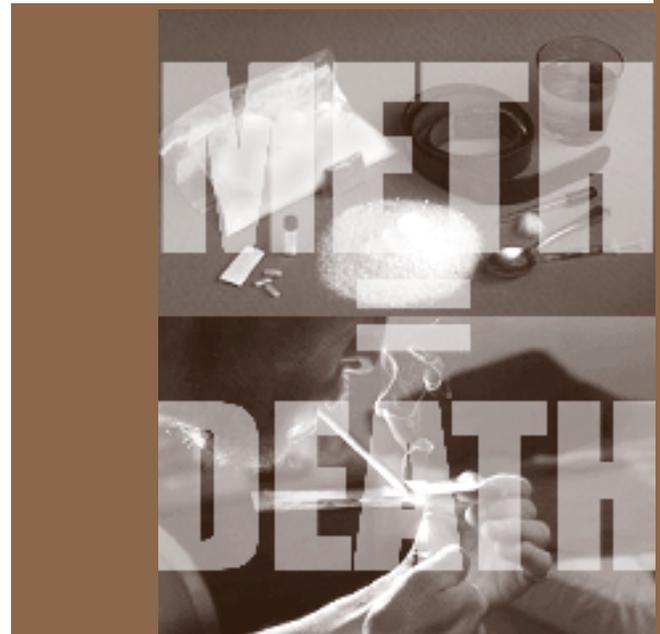
### *Determine if methamphetamine is a problem in your community*

The first step is to determine if, in fact, methamphetamine is a problem in your community. This is generally done by gathering both scientific and anecdotal data. Scientific data may include, but is not limited to: arrest reports (sales, manufacturing, under the influence), hospital admits, coroner reports, treatment admits, and meth lab seizures. Anecdotal data can include information gathered from key informant interviews, focus groups, and informal surveys. The data gathered should provide as much detail as possible. Are there gender or ethnic trends? Is it primarily an adult problem? Is the majority of the meth found on the street from small “Mom and Pop” labs? How readily available is the drug?

### *Identify and engage community partners*

Through the process of gathering data, you will likely identify individuals and agencies that have an interest in addressing the problem. Invite these individuals to come to the table as a stakeholder. Work together to determine who else is missing. In addition to your local law enforcement agency, do you have the Drug Enforcement

Administration at the table? What about Probation? Parole? The District Attorney’s Office? Are there city and county representatives at the table? Are both treatment and prevention practitioners involved? What about health care providers?



**One of the groups that are often the most difficult to get to the table, but are ultimately one of the most important, are community residents.** These are the people who live in the neighborhood 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They will have the greatest sense of what is really happening and the most realistic perception of what can be done to help reduce the problem. They are the “eyes and ears” of the neighborhood and will provide invaluable information to the group (as well as the details of who is doing what). But how do you go about identifying residents? Start by asking your stakeholders. Presumably these individuals work with community residents on a regular basis and can introduce them to your group. You

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**Tactics** (tak'tiks) n. **1.** a plan for promoting a desired end. **2.** the art of the possible.

will gradually increase resident involvement by asking those residents to introduce you to other residents or groups of residents, who then introduce you to more residents, and so on. You can also hit the pavement and do some community engaging on your own. Talk to the people you encounter, build rapport, and invite them to a meeting. If your community includes a large number of apartment complexes, work with the manager to reach the residents. Perhaps you can be a presenter at a resident meeting. Don't forget to invite the apartment manager to become involved as well. Finally, you can turn to the traditional modes of mailers and advertisements. You should be able to get a free spot in the local newspaper under "upcoming meetings" or, better yet, get a journalist to write a story about the group. Mailers are generally quite expensive and the return is generally very low.

### ***Provide structure***

To keep both residents and stakeholders involved, the group must have a common goal, be well structured, and have clear leadership. Delineate roles and responsibilities, being realistic about the workload each individual is asked to take on. Those in leadership roles must be trusted by the group, as well as others in the community, and have the skills to manage a variety of issues that may arise. Most importantly, the leader must be responsive to the needs of each of the members of the group and keep a pulse on all that is happening.

### ***Establish goals and objectives***

As a group, review the data you have gathered. Is any additional data required? If so, identify where the information can be acquired. Once your group feels that all of the available data has been reviewed, prioritize the most apparent problems. Due to personal biases, this process is not always as easy as it sounds. Utilize a strategic planning process to thoroughly explore each of the problems. Determine your goal(s),

objectives, responsible party(ies), and timeline. It is a good idea to have both short-term and long-term goals. Again, be realistic in selecting your priority activities and in developing your timeline. **Select one or two "easy" projects that your group can rally around and experience success in a relatively short amount of time. This will foster momentum to work on those harder, more involved projects.**

### ***The Weed & Seed Model***

The Weed & Seed Program, from the US Department of Justice Community Capacity Development Office, provides an excellent framework to address problems within neighborhoods. The philosophy of Weed & Seed is to build and strengthen communities through collaboration and coordination with a variety of agencies, organizations, and neighborhood residents. **The goal is to "weed" out criminal activity from the neighborhood and to "seed" the neighborhood with positive activities.** There are over 300 Weed & Seed sites across the United States. Sites range in size from 3,000 to 50,000 residents, and from several neighborhood blocks to 15 square miles.

#### **Weed & Seed strategies**

Four strategies are addressed in every Weed & Seed site:

- Traditional Law Enforcement
- Community Oriented Policing
- Prevention/Intervention/Treatment
- Neighborhood Revitalization

### ***Strategies to address methamphetamine related problems***

The comprehensive approach of Weed & Seed can easily be used to address the problem of methamphetamine. Activities under two, or even three, of the Weed & Seed strategies may be used to address a particular issue. The following are strategies used to address specific methamphetamine related problems.

### ***Drug sales***

Drug sales require both traditional law enforcement and community oriented policing efforts to make the most impact. Traditional law enforcement may include the development and utilization of a task force to specifically work on methamphetamine cases. These task forces are generally comprised of law enforcement officers from a variety of agencies, such as the Sheriff's Department, local police departments, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and perhaps even the local HIDTA (High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area), Parole and/or Probation. The task force can investigate cases and make arrests. In conjunction with a task force, or independently, local law enforcement may conduct special operations in which undercover officers are placed on the street to attempt to purchase methamphetamine. Community Oriented Policing officers can be utilized to determine how and why the problem is occurring in a particular area. **Crime prevention strategies may be implemented to help reduce the problem. For outdoor sales, a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment can help determine if additional lighting, trimming of bushes, the addition of cameras, or other tools may reduce the likelihood of sales occurring at the site.**



### ***Methamphetamine labs***

Mid-to large-sized methamphetamine labs in California are becoming less common as much of the manufacturing has moved down into Mexico, where there are fewer restrictions on the purchasing of chemicals required to make the drug. However, there are still those who attempt to manufacture their own supply or enough to sell. Once a lab, however small, has been identified, law enforcement officials and trained hazardous waste management teams will respond. How do these small labs get identified? Some are found by chance, but many others are identified as a direct result of community members reporting suspicious activity and/or smells. Educating community members, apartment and hotel managers, staff at storage facilities, and others about what to look for and how to report suspicious activity will greatly increase the likelihood of identifying these labs and eradicating them. **Training sales clerks can also greatly impact local manufacturing, perhaps even before the manufacturing process is started.** Sales clerks need to be aware of laws restricting the sales of medications and chemicals found in methamphetamine and the combination of items required for manufacturing. They also need to know how to report suspicious individuals. They should not be directed to stop the sale (unless the sale of the product is a violation of state or federal law), but rather to gather whatever information they can (name, driver's license number, license plate number, etc.) in an inconspicuous manner. That information should then be immediately turned over to the police.

## *Federal Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005*

- **Non-liquid products containing ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, or phenylpropanolamine must be kept “behind-the-counter” and the seller must hand the item directly to the purchaser**
- **The daily base quantity for any retail purchaser is 3.6 grams per day**
- **Individuals purchasing a product with more than 60 milligrams of pseudoephedrine are required to show photo identification and sign a log maintained by the seller for a minimum of two years**
- **Sellers must have a self-certification on file with the Attorney General**
- **Mail-order: the seller must confirm the identity of the purchaser prior to shipping the product and may not sell more than 7.5 grams of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or phenylpropanolamine base in such products per customer during a 30-day period**

### ***Problem properties***

Coordinated efforts between law enforcement, city and county departments, and property owners/managers can greatly impact the presence of methamphetamine in a neighborhood. The environment of a particular apartment complex is directly impacted by its management. Those that participate in Crime-Free Multi-Housing generally experience a reduction in criminal activity, including the sale and/or use of drugs such as methamphetamine. The first step in Crime-Free Multi-Housing is attending a Landlord Training. This 8-hour training is useful for owners, managers, and facility maintenance workers. It includes information on screening tenants, establishing tenant expectations, implementing a lease addendum, identifying potential problems, and the importance of enforcing the rules of the complex. The next step is to conduct a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment. Again, the purpose of the assessment is to determine if physical changes can be made to reduce criminal activity. This often

includes the trimming of bushes, additional lighting, the installation of a security gate, and/or the addition of security cameras or security guards. The utilization of a detailed lease and a lease addendum are imperative to the success of the program. Some of the items that should be included are the provision that no part of the apartment may be sublet without prior approval, a restriction on the number of days a person can stay at an apartment without being on the lease, and the prohibition of illegal activity. The addendum should specifically state that an arrest is enough cause for eviction.

### ***Abatement Task Force***

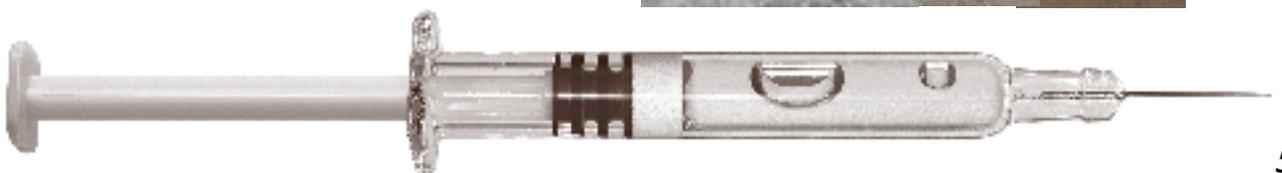
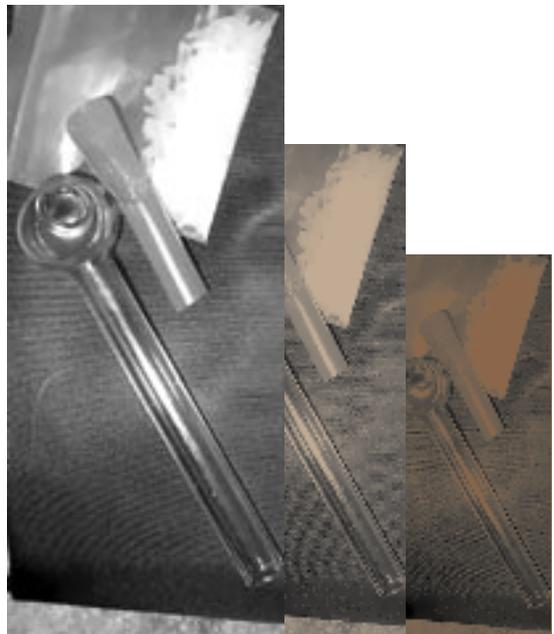
**If owners/managers of apartment complexes, duplexes, single-family homes, or businesses are uncooperative and allowing illegal activity or other problems to persist on their premises, it is time to take the issue to another level.** Cities and counties can establish an Abatement Task Force, which should include a variety of agencies, such as: law enforcement, Code Compliance, Building Inspectors,

Fire Department, Health Department, Water District, and even the local cable company. Individuals from any of these agencies, or citizen complaints, may bring a property to the attention of the rest of the group. A joint inspection of the property may identify a multitude of problems that need to be addressed. The owner of the property is notified in writing of all of the violations and will likely receive some citations from the various organizations. A date for compliance of all of the issues will be established and a follow-up visit will be scheduled. If, after documented warning and administrative citations, the problem is not corrected, the municipality can take the property from the owner in accordance with their municipal codes. This can also be accomplished after documented criminal complaints through civil injunction (H&S Code 11570 et sq). Residents can also take the issue into their own hands by following the Safe Streets Now model. Neighbors carefully document the problem and then send a letter to the property owner demanding that the problem be fixed. If, after several attempts to get the owner to fix the problem, the problem persists, neighbors can sue the identified owner in small claims court for up to \$5,000 each.

### ***Drug paraphernalia***

Municipalities can also impact the sale of drug paraphernalia through their Business Licensing, Planning, and Code Compliance departments. By restricting the sale of products known to be used for the ingestion of illegal narcotics, municipalities send a message that drug use will not be tolerated. This certainly sounds simple and logical enough, but the laws are tricky in this

area. Most businesses that sell meth pipes are savvy enough to know that they should not admit that the items are for drug use and to say that marijuana pipes and bongs are for smoking “tobacco”. They may even only sell pipes “disguised” as packaging for a silk flower, air freshener, or some other item. These items themselves are not illegal. Some cities have ordinances requiring a license to sell drug paraphernalia while others may be able to restrict the items completely. The tactic used by the cities to address this issue will vary greatly depending on whether the city has a regulatory business license system or a revenue-generating business license system. Despite the difficulty in addressing the problem from a legal standpoint, community pressure can greatly impact the problem. **Residents need to voice their concern about the items being sold and very publicly draw attention to the issue. If stores begin to lose customers because they are selling these items (which they likely do not make much profit on), they will probably remove the items from the shelf.**



### ***Identity theft***

Businesses can play an important role in reducing the problem of identity theft. This issue seems to be in the news all the time now, but many people do not realize there is a connection to methamphetamine. A recent program by the San Diego County Methamphetamine Strike Force has brought light to the issue. Key informant interviews conducted with meth users in recovery revealed that many would steal personal information about individuals (from mail boxes, trash cans, or at work) and either exchange the information for meth or sell it to get money to buy the drug. The work group also closely examined several identity theft cases and consulted with other agencies investigating the issue and found that methamphetamine was a factor in many identity theft cases. The Stop Meth Associated Crime (SMAC) campaign involves working with businesses to ensure that they are truncating credit card numbers (only showing a portion of the numbers) on receipts, which is a state law, and that they are shredding all personal information on customers. Proper screening of potential employees is also included in their recommendations. Continued public information campaigns about how individuals can protect themselves are equally as important.



### ***Those impacted by methamphetamine***

Finally, the methamphetamine user must be addressed. We would do a great disservice, and not be very successful, if we ignored this issue. One of the greatest concerns is, of course, children. Exposure to the chemicals used to make methamphetamine, as well as the drug itself, can be very harmful, particularly to children. Wide-spread attention was brought to this issue in 1995 when a meth lab exploded in Riverside County, killing three young children. State legislation was modified in 1998 to add prison enhancements for the presence of children at methamphetamine labs. The Drug Endangered Children's (DEC) program was developed as a pilot project at the same time. Today, DEC programs are in more than a dozen states. In addition to extensive training, the program involves having a social worker on call to respond to crime scenes involving methamphetamine, in which children are present. An important component of the program is the testing of the child for drug/chemical exposure.

**Many treatment programs are now finding that methamphetamine is the “drug of choice” of more of their clients than any other drug.** There are some unique issues that arise with this population and differences in gender, race, and sexual orientation can also impact motivations for use as well as successful treatment strategies. Treatment providers should make themselves aware of these variations so that they may best assist their clients. However, the bottom line is that appropriate treatment works and must be included as part of the overall plan to address methamphetamine.

## ***The Role of the Media***

The media can play a very big role in the success of all of these tactics. Both print and broadcast media should be used to share the stories of what is happening in the community, as it relates to methamphetamine, and how individuals can get involved. It is particularly important to get the media to recognize the relationship between methamphetamine and many of the stories they are covering. For example, if the suspect in a crime was under the influence of methamphetamine, it should be mentioned in the report or article. This helps people recognize the seriousness and magnitude of the problem in their community. It is just as important to show that meth addicts can get clean and turn their lives around. Human interest pieces are a great way to highlight success stories.

## ***Monitor and evaluate***

No matter what tactics a community employs to address their methamphetamine problem, program monitoring and evaluation are imperative. Monitoring drug trends and program activities helps ensure that the program is on track and relevant. Evaluation will not only demonstrate whether the tactics employed are effective, it will provide you with the data needed to gain additional support for your program – whether it be additional collaborators or additional funding, or both.





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### *Resources:*

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**[www.ca-cpi.org](http://www.ca-cpi.org)**

**[methresources.gov](http://methresources.gov)**

**San Diego County Methamphetamine Strike Force**  
**[www.no2meth.org](http://www.no2meth.org)**

**Community Capacity Development Office**  
**[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo)**

**California Alliance for Drug Endangered Children**  
**[www.cadecalliance.com](http://www.cadecalliance.com)**

**National DEC Alliance**  
**[nationaldec.org](http://nationaldec.org)**

**International Crime Free Association**  
**[www.crime-free-association.org](http://www.crime-free-association.org)**

**National Crime Prevention Council**  
**[www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)**

**Identity Theft Resource Center**  
**[www.idtheftcenter.org](http://www.idtheftcenter.org)**

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or send an email to

**[cpiinfo@cars-rp.org](mailto:cpiinfo@cars-rp.org)**

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**Author: Kathy Valdez**

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