

The Fresno Bee



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CAPITOL & CALIFORNIA

Personal horrors aid meth fight



A television ad campaign by the Partnership for a Drug Free America shows a methamphetamine user with self-inflicted sores on her neck.

State launches ad blitz featuring addicts whose stories aim to battle the scourge of the popular drug.

By Peter Hecht
BEE CAPITOL BUREAU

The camera draws in on a young woman's face. Her teeth are blackened with decay. Her neck is covered with red sores - the work of a manic methamphetamine addict who can't stop clawing at her own skin.

"It's really not a big deal," she says in an upbeat chatter. "It's like, you know, who's gonna tell? I mean look at me. You can't tell. I'm fine. Right? I'm fine."

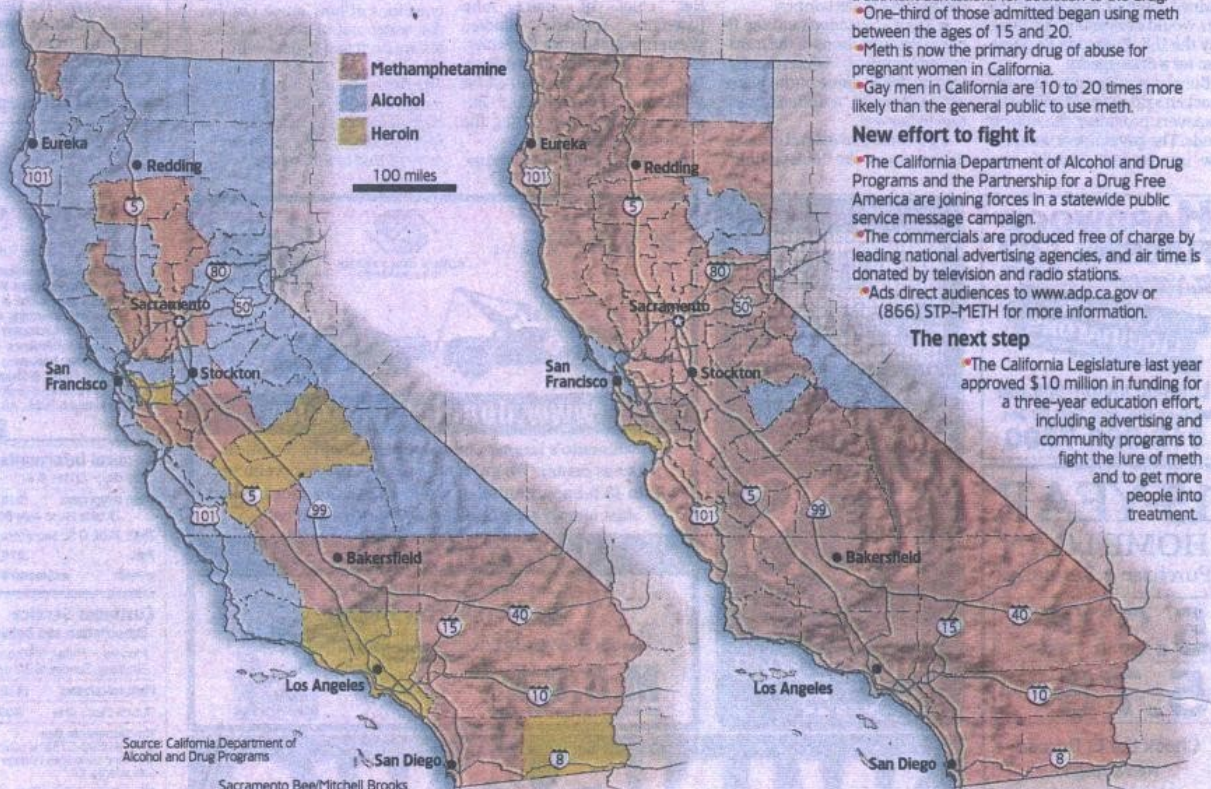
The message is one of many television commercials - grim, stark and powerful - now being aired in California media markets. It's part of a campaign aiming to curb methamphetamine abuse in a state that is far and away the national leader in the meth scourge.

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Methamphetamine dominates treatment programs

Primary drug of abuse
fiscal year 2000-01

Primary drug of abuse
fiscal year 2004-05



The meth problem

- California leads the nation in methamphetamine abuse. In 2005, the state accounted for 40 percent of the nation's publicly-funded treatment admissions for addiction to the drug.
- One-third of those admitted began using meth between the ages of 15 and 20.
- Meth is now the primary drug of abuse for pregnant women in California.
- Gay men in California are 10 to 20 times more likely than the general public to use meth.

New effort to fight it

- The California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs and the Partnership for a Drug Free America are joining forces in a statewide public service message campaign.
- The commercials are produced free of charge by leading national advertising agencies, and air time is donated by television and radio stations.
- Ads direct audiences to www.adp.ca.gov or (866) STP-METH for more information.

The next step

- The California Legislature last year approved \$10 million in funding for a three-year education effort, including advertising and community programs to fight the lure of meth and to get more people into treatment.

Source: California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs

Sacramento Bee/Mitchell Brooks

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Meth: Ads helped cut Montana's drug woes

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The public service campaign – which began in the Sacramento market last month – is part of a combined effort by the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs and the Partnership for a Drug Free America.

Television and radio spots and a Web campaign of horror stories from meth users and victims have been produced for free by leading national advertising agencies. Air time is donated by local television and radio affiliates and a related public relations campaign is funded under a \$200,000 federal Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment block grant.

"We're using this as a jumping-off point to begin the discussion with California communities on the nature of this problem," said Kathryn Jett, the director of state alcohol and drug programs.

The public service campaign is but a precursor to a \$10 million "California Methamphetamine Initiative." The three-year program, funded by the Legislature in 2006, will develop a statewide public education campaign targeting high risk populations affected by methamphetamine.

In 2005, California led the nation with over 77,000 publicly funded treatment admissions for meth abuse. Methamphetamine addiction in the state has reached such proportions that California now accounts for 40 percent of the nation's total medical admissions for the drug.

The state's long-term campaign seeks to target three groups deemed particularly at risk: gay men, pregnant women and teens.

With meth seen by many users as a potentially euphoric high, a sexual stimulant and a weight loss drug, one-third of California users begin taking the drug between the ages of 15 to 20.

Meanwhile, gay men in California are considered 10 to 20 times more likely than the general public to use the drug. And methamphetamine accounts for 57 percent of reported drug abuse among pregnant women.

So Jett said California is unleashing a multistep "social marketing and media campaign" to inspire meth users to seek treatment and "stop others from ever using it."

"This is a public health and public safety issue," Jett said. "We're seeing very high rates of trauma and abuse and a lot more

domestic violence. The drug creates paranoia, questions and fear about things that aren't even happening. And that leads to violence."

Arguing that media campaigns can work to curb methamphetamine abuse, Jett points to the success of the \$5.6 million "Montana Meth Project" launched in 2005 with primary funding from a computer industry entrepreneur, Thomas Siebel.

In a report last month, Montana Attorney General Mike McGrath reported a 73 percent drop in 2006 in workplace positive drug tests for amphetamines or methamphetamines.

Officials in Montana also credited a 2005 law, similar to policies in California, that put cold medicines containing pseudoephedrine – a key component in methamphetamine – behind pharmacy counters. California law restricts the amount of pseudoephedrine products consumers can buy at one time.

Cathy Dunn, California regional manager for the Partnership for a Drug Free America, insists that shock therapy works in the anti-meth media campaign.

And so Californians are viewing public service television spots such as one showing a doll being dipped in a vat of boiling oil. "What happens when someone uses crystal meth?" the voice-over says. "You slide into a world that will burn away the way you look, your health, your sanity and eventually, your life."

The ads direct audiences to the state alcohol and drug program Web site, www.adp.ca.gov, or to an informational hot line, (866) STP-METH (787-6384).

Meanwhile, in a related Web campaign (www.drugfree.org), viewers can hear "Paul's Story" – featuring a Maricopa County jail inmate breaking down while telling of his descent from star high school soccer player to a meth abuser and armed robber.

And they can tune in to "Ashley's Story" and "Amber's Story," the accounts of two girls who had to fend for themselves as their parents spiraled into meth use and their mother stabbed their father.

"Our idea is to keep it real," Dunn said. "We want to show the devastating impact meth has."

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