

Denver Post Meth campaign is welcome message

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The Colorado Meth Project's ads are edgy, but stopping youths from trying methamphetamine is key to curbing the scourge.

Highly addictive methamphetamine has cut a swath across the rural West, ruining lives and fueling crime.

Colorado, ranked eighth in the country for meth use in the last year, has been particularly hard hit due to the state's relative proximity to Mexico, where most of the meth comes from these days.

With this in mind, it was heartening to see the recent announcement of a public-private campaign in Colorado designed to prevent young people from trying meth.

Some of the "Not Even Once" ads admittedly have a harsh feel that some might find reminiscent of bygone anti-drug campaigns like "This is your brain on drugs."

The edgy ads the Colorado Meth Project is planning to display via television, radio, print and the Internet show the physical and mental disintegration of kids who use meth.

Some might find them apocalyptic. Yet their portrayal of the drug's effects is accurate. Meth is a devastating drug and the fewer people who use it the better.

Meth delivers an intense high, causing the brain to release huge amounts of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that controls pleasure. Researchers have found meth users get a rush of dopamine 12 times what they'd experience from pleasurable food or sex.

It's not surprising, then, that the drug is highly addictive, since users feel profound depression when the drug wears off after six to 12 hours.

Addicts will do virtually anything to get money to feed their habits and are particularly given to identity theft, said Colorado Attorney General John Suthers.

He estimated that two-thirds of identity theft crimes in Colorado are committed by meth addicts.

Furthermore, the users who are parents tend to focus so much on their addiction that they lose interest in their children, prompting social service intervention.

A RAND Corporation study released in February estimated the economic burden of meth use in the U.S. in 2005 was \$23.4 billion.

The figure includes costs associated with drug treatment, health care, crime and criminal justice, child endangerment and lost productivity.

To be sure, there has been progress on the meth front recently, especially in Colorado. The number of local labs has decreased dramatically, primarily due to enforcement, and restrictions on the sale of certain cold medicines used to create meth. That is a good thing, no doubt.

It is also beneficial for individuals to have some idea of the human wreckage created by meth use.

The Colorado Meth Project, which riffs off other similar — and successful — efforts, is funded by federal grants expected to reach \$1.5 million and private donations of \$2.5 million from entities such as the Daniels Foundation, Adolph Coors Foundation, and the Anschutz Family Foundation.

It's encouraging to see the collaboration. Such public service missions are inevitably stronger for having local buy-in.

Meth has been a significant problem in Colorado for a decade. We wish the Colorado Meth Project success in its efforts to prevent young people from even trying the drug. If an ounce of prevention is truly worth a pound of cure, it seems the Meth Project is on the right track.