

Print Page

**MONDAY MAY 19, 2008** :: Last modified: Thursday, January 10, 2008 2:06 AM MST

---

## Meth conference opens in Casper

By JOSHUA WOLFSON  
Star-Tribune staff writer

Although methamphetamine may be on the decline, it's not time for the Cowboy State to declare victory.

So cautioned Casper Police Chief Tom Pagel at the opening of the fifth annual Methamphetamine and Substance Abuse Conference in Casper.

"We are a long ways from victory, but we are on a good, solid path here and we are starting to see some success," he said.

Methamphetamine abuse will be around for many years, he added, and other drugs are becoming more of a problem.

"As we see some success, we are seeing our old friend, that 800-pound gorilla, alcohol, just continue to rise," he said. "So we need to broaden our focus."

Pagel's comments kicked off the three-day conference, which will cover a variety of topics, from improving substance abuse treatments to prescription drug abuse. The event is expected to draw more than 400 participants and will feature speakers from across Wyoming and the nation.

In his speech, Pagel advocated raising Wyoming's tax on beer, which now stands at two cents a gallon, and using the money to address substance abuse problems. The tax is the lowest in the nation and hasn't been raised in 73 years, said Casper Crime Prevention Officer Pete Abrams.

During a lunchtime address, Sen. John Barrasso discussed a bill he is cosponsoring that would allow for seized criminal funds to clean up meth labs. The legislation would use money taken from drug dealers to clean up contaminated sites, which can cost tens of thousands of dollars, Barrasso said.

"The goal is not to use taxpayer money," he said.

The conference, which is being held at the Parkway Plaza Hotel and Convention Centre, continues today. A free public session on addiction is set for 6 p.m.

Reach Joshua Wolfson at (307) 266-0582 or at [josh.wolfson@trib.com](mailto:josh.wolfson@trib.com).