



**Casper Star-Tribune
There's More to Do in Fight Against Meth**

February 15, 2009

Star-Tribune Editorial Board

Natrona County's and Wyoming's progress in the battle against methamphetamine is worthy of celebration.

But as Mike Burnett, coordinator of the Casper Area Meth Initiative, said last week, it would be a mistake to claim victory.

There's no question that things are better today than they were three years ago, when a community task force came up with 81 recommendations to curb meth use. As Casper Police Chief Tom Pagel noted in a press conference last week, there is strong evidence that the anti-meth effort is having an impact.

For example, the percentage of criminal defendants who claim meth as their drug of choice has dropped from 26 to 9 percent. And drug arrests in Casper have declined by 16.5 percent in the past three years.

Credit for that progress goes to many: state lawmakers, for making it more difficult to obtain some of the ingredients in meth production; law enforcement, for cracking down on the supply of the drug; public and private campaigns, for pointing out the dangers of meth; and local businesses, for drug testing their employees.

It should also be noted that a public-private partnership has significantly expanded meth treatment options with the opening of new facilities and programs at the Central Wyoming Counseling Center in Casper.

Still, there are some newly released statistics that show there's still a meth problem in Wyoming:

* In 2007, 94 percent of U.S. District Court drug offenders in Wyoming were convicted of meth-related crimes, the highest rate in the country and up from 68 percent in 2005.

* A 2008 survey found that 23 percent of Wyoming teens see little or no risk in trying meth once or twice.

The Wyoming Meth Project ad campaign in the last year has been a terrific addition to the anti-meth efforts. Let's hope those graphic ads, along with good family discussions, will bring about a big reduction in the latter number. As long as it remains that high, there's a clear danger of meth use making a comeback.

Burnett put it best last week: "We can't start waving the flag and celebrating that we've finished, because we haven't. There still is a lot to be done."