

# CASPER Star Tribune C O M M U N I C A T I O N S

*Wyoming's News Source*

## **Even graphic ads don't do justice to dangers of meth**

**Star-Tribune Editorial Board | Posted: Tuesday, December 6, 2011 12:00 am**

Anyone who wonders if we're making any progress toward the dual goals of increasing personal responsibility and decreasing the use of drugs should look at our front page last Saturday.

We had two examples of alleged crimes in Casper related directly to the use of illegal substances that should shock our collective conscience, no matter how jaded our society has become when considering the ability of people to do stupid things.

The alleged perpetrators in both incidents are presumed innocent until proven guilty. But as a community we need to examine the charges and question how they occurred here.

The first article of two written by Star-Tribune reporter William Browning involved a 5-year-old child victim who police found standing near a Casper intersection last Thursday evening, when the temperature plunged to 13 degrees. The boy, who was wearing only short-sleeved pajamas and had no shoes, was crying for his mother.

The youngster led police to an apartment, where they encountered 33-year-old Kirk Erwin Steffey, who was wearing only a towel while walking outside the building. Police found drug paraphernalia in the apartment.

Steffey reportedly told police the boy's mother, Jennifer Mary Cromwell, left him in his care. While Steffey was being arrested for child endangerment, Cromwell and another woman, April Mae Orner, who both appeared intoxicated, entered the apartment.

Officers determined that Cromwell — who was naked from the waist down — had left Steffey's apartment to have sex with Orner in a nearby apartment, and at some point Steffey left Cromwell's son in the apartment alone and joined the women.

Prosecutors charged Cromwell with two counts of child endangerment. Both she and Steffey were also charged with one count each of misdemeanor possession of methamphetamine. The 5-year-old was placed in the custody of the Department of Family Services.

The second article related how Heather Christensen of Mills was formally charged last Friday with aggravated vehicular homicide in the death of a passenger in her Jeep pickup after a Nov. 14 accident.

Killed was 50-year-old Richard Dean Condelario. Christensen, who was driving, allegedly huffed dust cleaner before sideswiping a truck and hitting a traffic-light pole in west Casper. Condelario died from severe chest trauma.

Police said Christensen's blood tested positive for difluoroethane, the key chemical contained in pressurized air, and methamphetamine. Police said Christensen told them she had blacked out while driving.

It marked at least the third traffic accident here this year in which a driver was accused of huffing pressurized air. The other two did not result in deaths, although a young male victim whose car was struck in one of the accidents was left without a family vehicle and had thousands of dollars in medical bills.

In addition to the presence of meth, these two recent crimes are linked by the callous disregard shown for human life and a complete lack of personal responsibility and common sense.

What kind of person leaves a child to wander in freezing weather to participate in a meth-fueled sex party? How can anyone casually get behind the wheel after using meth and huffing pressurized air?

In today's issue, Star-Tribune reporter Jeremy Pelzer writes about Stephen M. Rachel, 56, of Cheyenne, who is accused of not only using meth but teaching his 15-year-old child how to use it and sharing the drug with him.

When they began being broadcast in Montana several years ago, public service commercials for the Meth Project — which has expanded to Wyoming — were sometimes criticized for being too graphic in their depictions of the violence, prostitution and other crimes associated with using the drug.

These three incidents, however, show that when it comes to explaining the depths to which people involved with meth can sink, the ad campaign may not be graphic enough in showing how their craving for drugs leads them to act with despicable, reckless abandon for the welfare of others — even their own children.