

Print Page

MONDAY MAY 19, 2008 :: Last modified: Wednesday, January 10, 2007 11:27 PM MST

Wyoming residents battle meth

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In his opening remarks at the fourth annual Wyoming Statewide Methamphetamine Awareness Conference, Casper Chief Police Tom Pagel urged concerned citizens to travel to Cheyenne and lobby for money for a new drug treatment center and watch how legislators vote on meth-related proposals.

"It's a big year for the Legislature," Pagel said. "Watch these legislators and ask them, 'Why did you do that?'"

Acquiring money to build a 95-bed drug treatment center in Casper is one of Pagel's main goals. He said the center would be available to all Wyoming residents and he hopes the Casper community's initiative will spawn more treatment centers across the state.

Over the next two days, health professionals, law enforcement members and concerned citizens will be talking about new ways to prevent methamphetamine use and treat addicts and their families.

"It's not so much as a different strategy, but each year we bring the latest technology, best techniques from across the country," Pagel said.

This year, speakers came from several states to present about babies exposed to meth, community prevention programs and drugs in the workplace.

Dr. Rizwan Shah, medical director at the Regional Child Protection Center at Blank Children's Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa, spoke of her research dealing with how infants and young children are affected if their mother uses drugs during pregnancy.

Friday, Dr. David Moore, a researcher from Johns Hopkins University will speak about making drug-use prevention a part of many aspects of the community.

Pagel said prevention programs exist in the schools, but they need to be expanded to other areas of the community.

"What about the kids who are playing Little League, in Scouts or in band?" he said. "Have those coaches, scout leaders gone through substance abuse training? Kids need a consistent message."

Pagel said 400 to 500 people registered to attend the conference this year. The conference continues today and Friday.