

Campaign replaces anti-meth effort

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CHEYENNE -- Wyoming Department of Health officials said they chose to focus a new, \$1.7 million marketing campaign on alcohol and tobacco abuse prevention, rather than methamphetamine addiction, because that's what people want.

In meetings across the state, Wyoming residents said alcohol and tobacco, not meth, are the biggest threats to their cities and towns, health officials said.

"The decision was a bottom-up decision based on what the communities thought we should do," said Rodger McDaniel, Department of Health deputy director for mental health and substance abuse services.

Dr. Brent Sherard, director of the state Department of Health, said alcohol is the drug of choice in Wyoming, so it makes sense to put the focus there. He said by addressing "gateway" drugs like alcohol and tobacco, the campaign could also affect methamphetamine consumption.

The Department of Health wrapped up an aggressive anti-meth campaign in February 2007. It featured shocking posters and TV commercials aimed at preventing meth addiction.

The department's decision to change its focus to alcohol and tobacco comes at the same time a privately funded effort, the Wyoming Meth Project, is getting started in the state. Eight foundations have chipped in for an annual budget of \$1.5 million for the effort, which is modeled after a successful program in Montana.

The Department of Health's new effort, meanwhile, will include a subtler, less preachy message encouraging Wyoming residents to consider the rights of others when consuming alcohol and tobacco, McDaniel said.

"It begins with the recognition that Wyoming people don't want to be told what to do by the government," McDaniel said. "But they do understand that if the choice I make has a negative impact on someone else, they have crossed the line."

The campaign slogan -- "Where do you draw 'the line?'" -- is designed to spark discussions about personal accountability, and help curb the state's drinking and smoking culture, officials said.

TV commercials are slated to run through the end of August. But rather than scaring people away from drugs, the message is one of awareness, said Mike Sukle of Denver-based Sukle Advertising & Design that crafted the campaign.

"A TV ad isn't going to change minds," Sukle said. "What it's going to do is raise these kinds of issues."

In addition to TV ads, the campaign includes funny radio commercials aimed at convincing smokers to seek help to give up their habit.

The "Where do you draw 'the line?'" slogan is already up at schools around the state, where heavy, green lines have been installed on the floors of schools to draw attention to the message.

Mayors in towns across the state are getting in on the act. Many have agreed to allow the state to paint green lines on buildings and other structures to help spread the word.

The campaign will also be featured in 30 liquor stores, 55 bars and 60 gas stations around the state.

A 1974 Swedish military vehicle with the "the line" slogan will attend at least 16 events around the state to help get out the message.

If everything goes right, Sukle said, the slogan and green line will become associated with the problems of alcohol and tobacco abuse in Wyoming, and will help drive home the idea that abusing alcohol and tobacco isn't a good way to live, Sukle said.

"It becomes more a movement than a marketing campaign," Sukle said.

Tom Kreider, an assistant principal at Cheyenne East High School, said the green line is already giving educators a way to talk about alcohol and tobacco without preaching to students.

"As I walk through the cafeteria, kids ask me about it," Kreider said. "I think it may be a very good jumping-off point for discussions for peers and for us to talk to the kids."

The timeline for the program is unclear. The TV ads will run through August, but McDaniel said the message could be carried

on for several years.

If the program works, it could also be expanded to include other issues facing the state, such as methamphetamine, McDaniel said.

Funding for the program will come largely from the state's share of the federal tobacco settlement case. Other sources include the state general fund, the Wyoming Department of Transportation and the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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