

Meth tops cocaine in Garfield County

Task force aims to intervene before meth use leads to crime

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GLENWOOD SPRINGS — A preliminary study into Garfield County felony drug cases over four years shows that the number of methamphetamine cases has topped the number of cocaine cases — previously the most prosecuted drug in the county.

The ongoing study, conducted by the Western Colorado Methamphetamine Research Center at Mesa State College, has looked at cases from 2003 to 2007 and found that methamphetamine has become the most prosecuted drug in the county.

At least 115 meth cases have been prosecuted in that time frame, according to the study.

The methamphetamine figure made up 47 percent of the 244 cases the study looked at. Cocaine was the second-most-prosecuted drug, with 108 cases or 44 percent of the total. Marijuana made up at least 18 percent of the cases.

Of the 115 meth prosecutions, 31 percent of the defendants were women, according to the study.

“Cocaine was the predominant controlled substance in the county,” said Jeff Cheney, chairman of the Garfield County Meth Task Force executive committee and assistant district attorney with the 9th Judicial District. “Meth has surpassed it.”

Cheney presented the study, along with updates about the Garfield County Meth Task Force, to the Garfield County commissioners on Tuesday. He said the study was intended to show that “meth is a problem in the county,” Cheney said.

The county’s meth task force was formed in November 2006, based on a similar model in Mesa County.

“We have left the runway and we are trying to get airborne,” Cheney told commissioners.

County commissioners on Tuesday awarded a \$25,000 contract to Community Health Initiatives, which will administer the funds for the task force. Cheney said members are looking to use most of that money for “needs-based” treatment and to prevent potential users from “reaching out to the community by committing crime.”

"If we can get to these people before they get to the criminal justice system, we can save the taxpayers money," Cheney said.

Other money from the contract is expected go toward law enforcement to stem the flow of meth, Cheney said.

The task force has divided into several subcommittees, touching on subjects including drug-endangered children, treatment, public safety, and prevention and public awareness. An executive committee oversees them all.

"The meth task force is looking for people of the community to participate. It is not solely law enforcement," said Cheney, who added people can call the district attorney's office for more information or to participate. "It is not solely the treatment community. It is a community-focused group. We want members of the community involved."

Commissioner Trési Houpt told Cheney to "keep up the battle and let's educate" people about the dangers of meth in the county.

"We are really proud of you," Commissioner John Martin told Cheney and others associated with the task force. "Thank you for stepping up and doing this."