

## "Illinois to air Meth Project ads"

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The Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — The camera pans past family photos as an erratic teenager yanks his mother's purse off a table. She tries to stop him, but he pushes her to the floor, pockets a few bills and kicks her face on the way out the door.

The commercial ends with an ominous message: "Meth. Not even once."

If the image is shocking, it's designed to be. Beginning Monday, that ad and others like it began airing in the Springfield, Decatur and Champaign areas. The gritty ads are a part of a \$1.2 million effort to dramatize the dangers of methamphetamine.

The plan is to hit adolescents with the anti-meth message about three times a week. Illinois is the fourth state to join the campaign, first established in Montana in 2005 by software magnate Tom Seibel.

Other ads show a blood-splattered bathroom sink, a teen lying unconscious on an operating table and meth users with oozing scabs and rotted teeth.

"This isn't about scare tactics," said Seibel, whose foundation provided the money for the campaign. "The ads are gripping, rough, attention-getting. They are politically incorrect. And they are effective."

Seibel hopes to raise an additional \$6 million through private donations and grants to show the ads for the next two years.

The Meth Project is the brainchild of Seibel, who decided it was time to bring the program to his home state. Illinois ranks fourth in the nation in meth-related arrests, the group says, and meth treatment admissions have jumped 73 percent in the last decade.

The University of Illinois reports that meth use costs the state about \$2 billion each year.

The Meth Project claims that in Montana adult and teen meth use in the state fell by 70 percent and 45 percent, respectively, within two years of the ads' introduction.

But not everyone is on board with Seibel's plan. Some critics question the group's use of scare tactics and claim the group inflates its effectiveness — for instance, by taking credit for meth declines that began before the group formed.

And while Montana, Arizona, and Idaho gave the Meth Project a thumbs up, Utah passed on the gritty ads in favor of less shocking ones.

While most public service announcements air during the late night hours, the Illinois spots will run during top-rated shows like "America's Next Top Model," "Lost" and "American Idol." The broadcasts depicting bloody and toothless teens will also show up on larger cable networks like ESPN, E! Entertainment and MTV.

The graphic images are necessary to drive home the point of meth's dangers, said Greg Sullivan, executive director of the Illinois Sheriffs' Association. The Illinois Meth Project estimates a 15

percent increase in meth usage in the last few years.

“Children feel invincible. We needed to hit them in between the eyes and we need to hit them hard,” Sullivan said. “They needed to see what this drug can do and how devastating it can be.”