

# THE RICHMOND REGISTER

**Federal officials:**

## **Kentucky third in nation for reports of meth labs**

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By Brian Smith, Register News Writer

LONDON — Representatives of state and federal law enforcement agencies gathered with media members in an airplane hangar Wednesday morning to discuss the rise in methamphetamine production.

The “Meth Awareness 2009” conference was co-sponsored by the U.S. attorney’s office for the Eastern District of Kentucky, the Kentucky State Police, the federal Drug Enforcement Administration and Appalachian HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas).

A major focus of the conference was the rise in what law enforcement officers have termed “smurfing,” or the practice of methamphetamine cooks using multiple people to purchase pseudoephedrine, a key component of the drug.

Kentucky state law limits individuals to a maximum purchase of nine grams of the substance in a 30-day period, and all purchases of the drug, a common ingredient in cold medicines, are recorded in an electronic database that collects signatures and addresses.

Dave Keller, deputy director of Appalachian HIDTA, said that his organization, which coordinates efforts between federal, state and local authorities, is pursuing felony conspiracy charges against people who knowingly purchase pseudoephedrine to give or sell to meth cooks, a message Assistant U.S. Attorney Jason Denny reinforced.

“If you buy pseudoephedrine, even one box, and you know or have reason to know it will be used for manufacturing methamphetamine, you have committed a federal felony,” Denny said.

State police Capt. Kevin Payne, who commands the East Drug Enforcement Branch, which investigates drug trafficking and other drug crimes in the eastern half of the state, said state police already have neutralized 274 meth labs in the region his branch covers, which includes Madison County.

Payne said police discovered 428 meth labs last year and 210 more so far this year.

That’s up from totals in the years immediately following the 2005 enactment of the law limiting purchase of pseudoephedrine products. Payne said the number of meth lab busts fell to 328 in 2006 and 302 in 2007, after that law went into effect.

He offered the public a number of warning signs of possible methamphetamine activity, including a strong smell of ammonia, signs of chemicals being dumped, blacked-out windows, jars containing clear liquid with red or white residue and large numbers of cold medicine packages.

Payne said meth manufacturing is on the rise because so many of the ingredients are readily available.

“I think a lot of people start making meth or go back to making it because, look at the grocery list — we can all go to any department store, hardware store or even grocery store and get most of the items (used in making the drug),” Payne said. “They are common, easy-to-get items.”

Payne said many cooks are using a “shake and bake” method to make the drug by combining the ingredients in a single bottle or jar, then shaking the volatile mixture to begin the chemical reaction.

Many times, Payne said, meth cooks will use a plastic soda bottle, then after the drug is made, will seal the bottle and throw it out along roadways or in other public areas, creating a safety hazard for anyone who discovers it.

The conference also included a tour of the state police’s drug awareness trailer, which displays a model of a meth lab as well as information on how to recognize the signs of meth addiction, which include severe weight loss, loss of hair and teeth, extreme mood swings and changes in sleep patterns and eventual death.