

## 4/30/10 - CHPA Calls on Congress to Strengthen Combat Meth Act

The Consumer Healthcare Products Association (CHPA) today called on Congress to amend and strengthen the federal Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act (CMEA) by requiring nationwide electronic tracking (e-tracking) for all over-the-counter (OTC) sales of cold and allergy medicines containing pseudoephedrine (PSE) (see also Consumer Healthcare Products Association).

E-tracking is the only solution that will immediately block illegal sales and prevent criminals from buying illegal amounts of PSE to manufacture methamphetamine. At a hearing before the U.S. Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, CHPA President Linda Suydam made a commitment on behalf of industry to fund a national system and work with the retail community to expand the National Precursor Log Exchange (NPLEx) system currently being implemented in eight states that have passed e-tracking legislation. The NPLEx e-tracking system works in real time to stop individuals from exceeding package limits when purchasing PSE-containing medicines. Using sales records that CMEA already requires retailers to keep and which are only made available to law enforcement, NPLEx works across state lines and provides law enforcement with an effective tool to stop methamphetamine production.

"We are asking Congress to significantly improve the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act by leveraging cutting-edge technology to block illegal pseudoephedrine sales nationwide," said Suydam. "Electronic tracking offers the best solution to reducing methamphetamine labs without imposing a costly and unnecessary prescription mandate. Our goal is to stop illegal pseudoephedrine sales while maintaining important over-the-counter access to the 15 million consumers who rely on these medicines each year."

Daviess County Kentucky Sheriff Keith Cain who also testified before the caucus on the merits of electronic tracking added, "NPLEx offers capabilities for controlling the illegal diversion of pseudoephedrine that go far beyond anything available in the prescription arena. A prescription mandate would simply drive the meth cooks underground and cut off access to information critical to finding illegal meth labs."

Ten states have already adopted laws requiring retailers to use an e-tracking system to track PSE sales, including: Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Washington. Attorneys general from Alabama, Kansas, and Washington submitted letters to the caucus noting their support for electronic tracking and urged consideration of e-tracking at the federal level. CHPA is funding NPLEx in eight of these states to help retailers to comply with these new laws.

"My customers rely on timely access to cold and allergy medicines containing pseudoephedrine. Electronic logbooks provide a far more reasonable approach than requiring a prescription for OTC medicines. I am pleased that industry is offering to work with the retail community to stop the illegal purchasing of PSE medicines nationwide," noted Tim Tucker, PharmD, a Tennessee pharmacist who is working to implement NPLEx in his state.

Only two states, Oregon and Mississippi, have instead elected to make PSE medicines available by prescription only. Suydam told the caucus that, "when contrasted with electronic tracking, prescription mandates simply fall short. A prescription mandate would be more expensive to consumers, sales limits from CMEA would no longer apply, and there would be no system for real-time blocking of illegal prescription sales within states or across state lines."

Suydam also challenged the effectiveness of Oregon's prescription-only law, noting that most of Oregon's lab reductions occurred prior to the state's prescription mandate and that states across the West achieved similar results without such a burdensome restriction.

"The industry supports federal legislation requiring nationwide tracking, and we are asking that the current paper system be modernized to provide a system that will work seamlessly and more effectively across all states," said Suydam. "E-tracking systems like NPLEx are the most effective tool we have to systematically address methamphetamine production in this country. A multi-state approach to electronic pseudoephedrine sales tracking offers more benefits for law enforcement and consumers than a prescription mandate, but without the substantial and unnecessary costs of a prescription approach."

CHPA is the 129-year-old-trade association representing U.S. manufacturers and distributors of over-the-counter medicines and nutritional supplements.