

## Real-time tracking system to combat meth producers

By CHARLOTTE EBY, chareby@aol.com | Posted: Monday, June 21, 2010 12:00 pm

DES MOINES --- The battle against the illegal manufacture of methamphetamine will have a new tool in the coming months as an electronic system tracking over-the-counter sales of pseudoephedrine is phased in across the state.

Iowa pharmacies will soon be linked to a real-time system that registers sales of products with pseudoephedrine, a key ingredient for making illegal meth commonly found in cold and allergy medications.

The state in recent years adopted sales limits for pseudoephedrine. The next challenge for law enforcement was trying to stop people going from one store to the next and buying their limit of pseudoephedrine at each store.

Gary Kendell, director of the Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy, is hopeful the new tracking system will be able to seriously impair their ability to do that.

"They'll be able to go to one store, and that's it," Kendell said.

The system will allow officials to track the dosages of pseudoephedrine that people are buying in real time and will give pharmacists the ability to refuse to sell it if a customer is exceeding his or her limit. Implementation of the system will be phased in over the summer, and pharmacies that sell products containing pseudoephedrine will be required to participate in the system in September.

Under the new system, consumers will swipe their driver's licenses when making a purchase, in lieu of a paper log that tracks pseudoephedrine sales.

"It should make it a pretty quick process and actually make the lives of pharmacists a little bit easier, I think," Kendell said.

Some other states --- Kentucky and Arkansas --- have real-time tracking systems, Kendell said. A number of states near Iowa --- Illinois, Missouri, Kansas --- also are in the process of implementing their systems, according to Kendell.

That would allow for cross-border information. For instance, if someone in the Quad-Cities buys pseudoephedrine in Rock Island, Ill., a pharmacist in Davenport would know not to sell it to him or her if it would exceed the sales limit, Kendell said.

Kendell expects people still will try to circumvent the law, but believes the system will make it more difficult to accumulate enough pseudoephedrine to cook methamphetamine.

He said now a carload of people will go from pharmacy to pharmacy to buy pseudoephedrine.

"They're not going to be able to have as much access as they have before," Kendell said about the new system.

Kate Gainer, vice president of professional affairs with the Iowa Pharmacy Association, said the tracking system is something the organization supports.

"Pharmacists have wanted to be part of the solution and help the state," Gainer said.

Some chain pharmacies already are tracking sales electronically, she said, as well as some pharmacies in central and north-central Iowa that were part of a pilot program. Others track sales through paper logs.

What will be new is that pharmacies and their data will be linked together on a common system.

She said the organization believes using a tracking system is a better solution than requiring a prescription to obtain pseudoephedrine products.

"We feel that pharmacists are well-positioned to implement this system and help slow down inappropriate sales of pseudoephedrine," Gainer said.