



Database Helps Police Track Meth 'Smurfs'

Last Update: 8:39 am

GALLATIN CO., Ky. -- Four people face drug charges after police say they used a statewide system to track them down.

The move of products containing pseudoephedrine from the store shelf to behind the pharmacy counter was supposed to regulate medicines used to make methamphetamine, but according to Bill Mark, director of the Northern Kentucky Drug Strike Force, cases of meth labs increased between 2008 and 2009.



Heather Smith, 24 (Carroll County Detention Center, 2010)

When customers buy products that contain pseudoephedrine, those purchases are logged in a statewide database called MethCheck.

"Even if we're not looking at a target individual, were just checking the logs from the pharmacy to see if there are any trends developing," said Mark.

Agents along with Gallatin County Sheriff's deputies arrested Jason Webb, 35, from Warsaw at a truck stop off I-71 Tuesday morning. Police say they watched him buy a meth-making ingredient.

With him were two women, Kristan Hall, 29, from Dublin, Ohio and Heather Smith, 24, from Cincinnati. Police say the two women were "smurfs," a term used to describe secondary purchasers of meth-making material.

Police say the nickname comes from the children's cartoon and is used because buyers usually travel in groups and go from store to store making buys.

A former user who goes by "Melissa" told 9News a \$5 box of nasal decongestant that contains pseudoephedrine can be sold for as much as \$50 on the black market.

"A lot of them don't even know what they're doing. They are just asked, 'Can you buy me a box of Sudafed?' A lot of them know what they're doing and know their compensation for it," said "Melissa".

"Other people 'smurf' because they're addicts themselves and they'll obtain the pseudoephedrine to trade it for meth," said Mark.

Clean for over a year, "Melissa" says the only way for her to escape the drug culture was to move back home to Northern Kentucky.

"It messes with your mind," she warned. "It's the worst drug in the world."

Police also arrested Clayton Walker, 47, of Cincinnati. He's charged with multiple counts of drug trafficking and could spend 10 years in prison for each count.

Webb, Hall and Smith could each face 20 years in prison.

Two bills were introduced during the latest Kentucky legislature session to address pseudoephedrine.

One would have required a prescription from a doctor to obtain the drug, the other would have decreased monthly purchase limits.

Follow 9News Reporter Larry Shields on Twitter

Copyright 2010 The E.W. Scripps Co. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.