

## Recent Victories, New Challenges in the War on Meth

**T**raditional battle with foreign enemies is often considered preferable to civil conflict. While no battle is most desirable, some must be waged. Case in point: Vigo County Sheriff Jon Marvel and other "soldiers" fighting Indiana's war on methamphetamine (meth).

"It is more difficult to fight imported (meth), but it's a challenge we've faced for a long time and it creates less risk for the public," Marvel explains. The ability to focus law enforcement attention on combating foreign-grown meth (usually from Mexico) is only made possible by limiting the homegrown supply.

A January/February 2006 *BizVoice*® article outlined Marvel's strategy and successes in limiting the domestic meth monster that has impacted many rural areas of Indiana. Local business retailers had voluntarily restricted the sale of products containing key meth ingredients at Marvel's request (prior to the state law mandating such actions). The law requires retailers to keep medications containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine behind a counter, in a locked case or directly in front of a pharmacy counter that has video surveillance.

Vigo County experienced a 66% decrease in meth lab busts and a significant drop in meth-related imprisonments during the two years following the retail restrictions and increased enforcement.



**Strong enforcement efforts have helped reduce the number of local methamphetamine labs in Vigo County.**

### Changing landscape

Some speculate that foreign imports are increasing as a result of domestic victories. Marvel contends that is not the case. "Imports aren't increasing; it has always been coming in. We just couldn't focus on it before," he states.

With the new focus comes the arrest of much larger suppliers. "When we busted home labs, we were dealing with meth measured in grams. We recently cooperated with federal authorities in capturing 10 pounds of imported meth worth \$500,000," Marvel reports.

A local advantage of fighting imports is the cost benefit associated with larger busts. Meth importers generally fall under state or federal prosecution depending on their supply; the larger possession amounts often become federal cases. This alleviates a great deal of pressure on county prosecution and incarceration resources.

Marvel will be the first to report that the return to traditional tactics, while preferred, is not without new challenges. One of the biggest difficulties, according to the sheriff, is the inability to profile the "type" of person transporting the drug. "Two of the Mexicans we recently busted were grandmother types who (typically) get warnings for speeding because they look like Aunt Bee," Marvel explains.

### Additional threats

Imported meth may be less dangerous in some aspects, but it brings with it a host of other problems. The crystallized meth coming from Mexico is often referred to by its street name – ice – and is described as being 90% pure. That level of purity increases occurrences of overdose and addiction, and makes it easier for dealers to distribute the drug.

Along with being more potent, ice is also much more expensive than non-crystal homegrown meth. What once sold for \$300 a gram is now selling for \$900. This, some law enforcement officials say, is the cause behind an increasing number of burglaries.

Numerous Indiana government and civic organizations have joined together to form the Meth Free Indiana Coalition. They work together in coordinating prevention efforts and educating the public on the dangers of meth addiction. National education efforts include the first National Methamphetamine Awareness Day (featuring 100 events across the country) hosted by the Department of Justice on November 30 of last year.

While many positive things are being done to combat the scourge of meth, most of the action has been aimed at limiting supply. Most experts agree that meth will continue to be available as long as demand remains high. Efforts to reduce this demand are a critical ongoing challenge.

To view the January/February 2006 *BizVoice*® article on meth, go to the archives section of [www.bizvoicemagazine.com](http://www.bizvoicemagazine.com)



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