

Anti-meth project calls on Yuma youth to not use, even once

[BY SARAH REYNOLDS, SUN STAFF WRITER](#)

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Not even once.

That is the pledge the Arizona Meth Project will ask Yuma's teens and young adults to take this Saturday.

"The (Arizona Meth Project) is trying to be busy and trying to get people to have some awareness as to what's going on," said Gretchen Thomas, coordinator of the Yuma County Meth Nucleus Group.

Project workers will be out from 4 to 10 p.m. in the Yuma Palms Regional Center Saturday. Thomas said they are hoping young people hanging out near Harkins Theaters and the other mall shops will take a moment to pledge never to use methamphetamines.

This is the first time a pledge event like this has been held in Yuma, but Thomas said group staff have spoken to about 4,000 children in schools and community groups about the dangers of meth.

Thomas said the methamphetamine problem in Arizona, and Yuma, is significant.

According to the Arizona Department of Health Services, in 2002, one in 10 new drug patients listed meth as an abused substance. This year that number was one in four.

The Excel Group's Southwest Recovery Center generally sees 10-20 referrals each week from the court system or private citizens, according to previous reports in The Sun.

The Arizona Meth Project is a collaborative prevention campaign aimed at young people of middle school age all the way up to 24.

Its goal is to reduce first-time methamphetamine use.

Based on a similar project in Montana, it uses gritty advertising images of the devastating physical and health affects of drug use to try to get the message out that meth use is dangerous.

Some images include pictures of drug users with emaciated faces, rotted teeth and sores and photographs of jail cells and emergency rooms where meth users could end up.

It also uses graphic personal stories from teenagers who are former meth addicts.

"It tries to hit kids where they are today," Thomas said.

Support comes from participating counties, including Yuma, as well as tribal and nonprofit agencies and funding from the Arizona Attorney General's Office.

Yuma County allocated \$120,178 to the project in December. The other participating counties are: Cochise, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, La Paz, Maricopa, Mohave, Navajo and Pinal.

WHO'S INVOLVED: The Arizona Meth Project and local workers from the Yuma County Meth Nucleus Group

WHAT'S GOING ON: Project workers are calling on Yuma youths to sign the "Not even Once" pledge against methamphetamine use

WHEN: Saturday, Aug. 4

WHAT TIME: 4 to 10 p.m.

WHERE: Yuma Palms Regional Center, 1305 S. Yuma Palms Parkway

WHY: This effort is part of a statewide campaign to discourage first-time meth use.

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