

Activity increasing in Darke, Preble counties

By Hali Gibson

Staff writer

EATON, Ohio — Street names vary but the infiltration is still the same.

Speed. Ice. Crank. Meth.

The popularity of crystal methamphetamine is slowly making its way from the west coast to Preble and Darke counties.

A small number of arrests have been made in each area. Three labs have also been cleaned up within the last year.

Sgt. Mark Gooding, Ohio State Highway Patrol, said methamphetamine cases are doubling in Preble and Darke counties.

"They're on the rise," Gooding said. "What has occurred is for the past 10 years it started out from Hawaii and moved east to California. From there it slowly moved across to Illinois, Indiana and Ohio."

Gooding said Ohio has had 170 methamphetamine labs seized this year.

"Personal use is on the rise due to the number of labs popping up around the state," Gooding said. "We've found truck drivers

crumbling it up and putting it in their Mountain Dew to stay up."

Detective Frank Ford, Preble County Sheriff's Department, said methamphetamine hasn't really hit Preble County yet.

"We just don't see a lot of it," Ford said. "We've seen it float around here and have made two arrests."

Ford said the sheriff's department found the remains of one methamphetamine lab in Preble County this year. The Drug Enforcement Agency was brought in to clean the lab at no cost to the county.

"I'm sure they're out there," Ford said. "We've had information that they're cooking in hotels but we've never confirmed that."

Darke sees meth activity

Darke County had its first opportunity to bust a methamphetamine lab in July.

The Darke County sheriff's deputies closed the lab July 6 and arrested one man in New Weston, Ohio. Officers seized methamphetamine products and

production equipment, firearms, computer files and other drugs from suspect James I. Allen, 41.

Allen was arrested at his residence, 2339 McFeeley-Petry Road, New Weston, and had faced an indictment on illegal manufacturing of the drug. He pleaded not guilty during his arraignment.

The Darke County prosecutor's office said the case has since been dismissed because Allen committed suicide while out of jail on bond.

Detective Sgt. Mark Whittaker, Darke County Sheriff's Department, said two labs have been found this year resulting in arrests.

"We have intelligence suggesting other labs are in operation," Whittaker said. "For a population of 55,000 one lab is a problem. Now that I've found two labs, it's a big problem."

Darke County also received clean up aid from the DEA. Whittaker estimated the clean up cost to be \$10,000 to \$20,000 for both labs.

The drug gives a feeling of increased alertness, anger, fear or

agitation as well as well being, euphoria or exhilaration. When the stimulant is too high, it produces feelings of panic, paranoia, hallucinations, rage, seizures and stroke.

"It's an extremely addictive drug," Whittaker said. "It's not uncommon for someone to smoke it once and then again. It can then become immediately addictive."

Cost attracts users

Gooding said what makes methamphetamine popular is the affordability of the drug.

"The reason people are going to the drug is because it's cheaper and has a longer high than crack cocaine," Gooding said. "To make meth, you can get on the Internet and learn how to make it. It's cheaper than going through the middle man."

Since most of the ingredients are household materials, a person could buy \$300 worth of materials from a local department store to make methamphetamine and turn around a \$3,000 profit, Gooding said.