

MEMORANDUM

TO: DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS
FROM: BART GORDON, RANKING MEMBER
SUBJECT: METHAMPHETAMINE FIELD EVENT

Last year I sponsored a Science Committee field event regarding the methamphetamine problem in my district. This event highlighted issues related to this problem which lie within the Committee's jurisdiction. I believe the model for my event could easily be adopted to meet the needs of Members who may also have a meth problem in their area and I wanted to explain what I did.

I brought together a leading local prosecutor, a manager of an emergency room for a major regional hospital, a child protective services employee, an environmental sciences professor from a local college and a regional special agent of the Drug Enforcement Administration. Each witness spoke about their personal experiences in trying to deal with the meth problem and the kinds of human and public disasters left in the wake of addiction to that drug.

That event highlighted issues where more research, more knowledge or more tools would be useful to law enforcement or social services providers. Among these items would be:

- Efficient field testing technologies to allow a first responder to identify a site as a meth lab.
- Health studies on the effects of exposure to the chemicals used in producing methamphetamines. This is particularly important for children exposed to meth and for first responders.
- The need for environmental remediation of the sites used for production. DEA funds a clean up of all the materials used in production. However, there is no legal requirement that a property be remediated to a safe level. We do not even have clear standards from EPA on what would constitute "clean."
- The biochemical and psychological mechanisms involved in addiction to meth and the most effective treatments for that addiction.

If meth is an established or growing problem in your region, an event of this kind would be easy to put together and definitely serves a useful public service. For example, our witness from Child Services indicated that many people in that field of work do not know what to look for as to materials and ingredients for an in-home meth lab. Social workers often have access to homes of "cookers" and may see things that, to the experienced observer, would be a sure give away. However, without more education, they may overlook these important clues, leaving children in jeopardy as a result.

I would recommend that you identify someone who can speak to health effects, child protective services, environmental remediation and law enforcement. You may also want to find a local addict in recovery who could speak to that experience. It is not necessary to invite either EPA (which does little on this issue) or DEA witnesses in my experience, though that is up to you and your local situation. You might consider including showing the types of materials that are commonly used in meth production to raise awareness of what to watch for. Then work with your local office to identify the members of the press most interested in this issue. Identify a venue where you can have the broadest impact on community awareness - a Community College or hospital for example- and host the session. We ran ours like an informal hearing, with witnesses providing testimony and "Members" at the dais asking questions. I invited a local State Senator, State Representative and County Executive to join me on the dais in asking questions and you might consider the same approach since combating meth will require cooperation across all levels of government.

Meth is spreading very rapidly in many parts of the Nation. Some areas are still largely untouched by this scourge. However, the low cost of materials for cooking a batch of meth, the ease of acquiring all the ingredients at any Wal-Mart, and the wide distribution of knowledge-recipes can be found on the Internet-seems to guarantee that no corner of this country will be spared from meth's poisons. We all need to do more to educate our constituents about the dangers associated with meth and I hope holding local events of the kind I describe can help in that regard.

My staff have collected information by Congressional district regarding arrests and have data on lab seizures by state if this would be of use to you. If your staff have specific questions about this field event, please feel free to have them contact Dan Pearson (5-4494) or Mike Quear (5-6917) of the Science Committee.