

Directed Patrol Strategy Designed to “Tip the Scale” from Criminality to Sobriety

Research shows that substance users and their ensuing criminal behavior levy an enormous burden on the criminal justice system¹. For example, nearly two-fifths of incarcerated individuals in 2004 were in custody for committing crimes to obtain money for drugs². Local data from SANDAG’s Substance Abuse Monitoring program show that 60 percent of adults arrested in 2010 tested positive for an illicit substance and 27 percent tested positive for methamphetamine (meth)³. Seeking to reduce drug-related crime, the San Diego County Methamphetamine Strike Force developed “Operation Tip the Scale” (TTS). These operations consist of multi-agency law enforcement partnering in directed patrols in high meth-use areas and include probation/parole compliance checks, serving warrants, and providing meth prevention information to users and their family members. Treatment providers engage individuals who have been arrested in the sweep in conversations about the benefits of treatment, with the belief that seizing this “teachable moment” provides the best opportunity to guide users into treatment and lifts some of the burden from the criminal justice system. To further deter drug use, media coverage is obtained to increase awareness of the risk of arrest.

To date, TTS operations have been conducted in five regions of the county, beginning in East County in March 2009 and most recently in the North Inland area in October 2011. While no formal evaluation of TTS has been performed, operations have resulted in 320 arrests and 147 treatment conversations to date (Table 1). Data compiled by the Sheriff’s Department suggest that both violent and property crime in the East Suburban area decreased to a greater extent after an operation compared to the County overall (not shown). The next TTS operation is planned for early 2012 in Encinitas.

Table 1
TTS Operations Conducted in Five Regions of San Diego County

| Region | Date | Number of Arrests | Number of Treatment Conversations |
|---------------|-------------|--------------------------|--|
| East Suburban | March 2009 | 209 | 59 |
| East Rural | April 2010 | 29 | 24 |
| South | Aug 2010 | 40 | 34 |
| North Coastal | Oct 2010 | 15 | 12 |
| North Inland | Oct 2011 | 27 | 18 |
| TOTAL | 10 | 320 | 147 |

SOURCES: Methamphetamine Strike Force, Escondido Police Department

Multidisciplinary efforts, such as Tip the Scale, are examples of the strong collaboration between agencies in the San Diego region and demonstrate how resources can be leveraged to effectively address underlying issues linked to criminality. For more information about Operation Tip the Scale, go to www.no2meth.org or call 1-877-NO-2-METH.

¹ Office of National Drug Control Policy. (2011). “Breaking the Cycle of Drug Use and Crime”. Retrieved on-line (November 8, 2011) at www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/11/03/breaking-cycle-drug-use-and-crime.

² Mumola, C. J. & Karberg, J.C. (2006). *Special Report: Drug Use and Dependence, State and Federal Prisoners, 2004*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

³ Burke, C. (2011). “2010 Adult Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region”. San Diego, CA: SANDAG.