

THE Compiler

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority Winter/Spring 2004



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The festering problem of methamphetamine in Illinois

Multijurisdictional drug units struggle to stem the rising tide of meth labs popping up in rural areas of the state

By Daniel Dighton

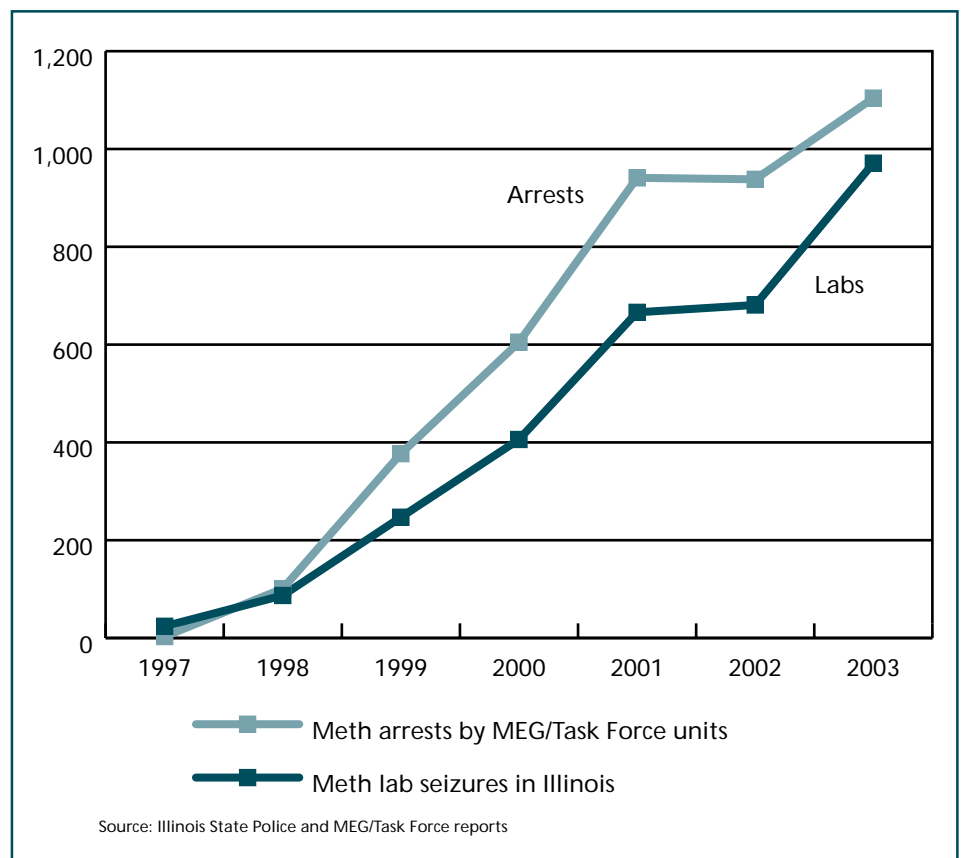
Methamphetamine is not the most commonly abused drug in Illinois, nor is it responsible for the most arrests. But it has quickly become the most dangerous and vexing problem for law enforcement in many rural areas, particularly in central and southern parts of the state.

While marijuana and cocaine are more popular and account for far more arrests, the manner in which methamphetamine is manufactured and distributed is so unique, and its addictive properties so powerful, that it has forced police in rural areas to alter their drug enforcement strategies as they struggle to keep up with the drug's rapid spread.

"It's the most dangerous drug and the most quickly spreading drug I've ever seen. I've never seen anything like this," said Illinois State Police Lt. Thomas Oliverio, who commands two drug task forces in southern Illinois.

Data from the 21 multijurisdictional drug units operating in Illinois in 2003 show that the number of clandestine meth labs seized in the state increased

Methamphetamine arrests and lab seizures in Illinois



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Created in 1983, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority is a state agency dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice. Most of the work of the Authority falls into three major divisions: Research and Analysis; Information Systems and Technology; and Federal and State Grants Administration.

The Authority is governed by a 20-member board comprised of state and local leaders from the criminal justice system and members of the public.

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to 971 that year from just 24 in 1997. Rural counties accounted for 83 percent of the lab seizures. While most of the meth labs have been in southern and central Illinois, data gathered by the Authority indicates the problem is spreading north and into more urban areas.

In 2003, 10 metropolitan enforcement groups (MEGs), and 11 drug task forces (one task force has since disbanded) made up the multijurisdictional drug enforcement units in Illinois. They were active in 63 of the state's 102 counties. In many regions they are in the forefront in the battle against meth, and they provide the only detailed arrest data available on the drug. For most law enforcement agencies in the state, meth arrests are lumped in with several other drugs that are reported to the state as arrests under the Controlled Substances Act.

Agents with the Southeastern Illinois Drug Task Force, which is based in Effingham and operates in Clark, Clay, Crawford, and Cumberland counties, encountered their first clandestine meth laboratories around 1996-1997, Oliverio said. By 1999 meth had emerged as a serious and time-consuming law enforcement issue. Last year the task force's five agents and their supervisor found 35 meth labs and made 70 meth-related arrests.

Marijuana and cocaine investigations, which used to occupy most of the task force's time, have given way to methamphetamine busts and lab seizures. Of the Southeastern Illinois Drug Task Force arrests last year, 70 percent were for meth, Oliverio said.

Oliverio also commands the Southern Illinois Drug Task Force based in Carmi in White County. The five officers in that unit seized 90 meth labs last year in a five-county area, he said.

Master Sgt. Steve Guess, commander of the East Central Illinois Task Force, which is based in Mattoon and operates in Coles, Shelby, Moultrie, and Douglas counties, has had a similar experience. "Meth is huge here. We (investigate) a little coke and marijuana, but meth is our bailiwick," Guess said, adding that 76 percent of the task force arrests last year were meth cases.

The East Central Illinois Task Force had seized only three labs prior to 1999, the year meth began to be a noticeable problem in the area. Over the next couple of years they seized about 200 labs, and in 2003 the task force seized 118 meth labs, Guess said.

Coles County was so overwhelmed with meth cases that the state's attorney's office received federal funding in late 2001 for a special drug prosecutor who works closely with Guess and the task force agents. The collaboration "has worked out fantastic down here," Guess said.

Highly addictive drug

Meth is a powerful stimulant that provides an intense high and feeling of euphoria. The effects can last for several hours, and some users will binge on the drug for days at a time. It has an extremely high addictive potential.

"It just takes over," Oliverio said. "I've never seen a drug take hold of a person like methamphetamine does. They can't control the meth, it controls them."

In many areas of the country where meth has taken hold, which are mostly rural areas in the West and Midwest, police have reported notable increases in violent crime, domestic violence, and child abuse, according to the DEA.

According to Master Sgt. Fred Bray, supervisor of the Southeastern Illinois Drug Task Force under Oliverio, meth

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New Authority report analyzes multijurisdictional drug enforcement unit activities, with a special section on meth

The 21 multijurisdictional drug enforcement units in Illinois last year consisted of 11 drug task forces and 10 metropolitan enforcement groups (MEGs). MEGs and task forces operate basically the same but have some minor organizational differences (see page 7).

Authority Senior Research Analyst Robert Bauer, with assistance from other staff researchers, recently prepared a report analyzing data from MEG and task force activities in Illinois. In 2002, the latest year that data was available for the report, 196 local police agencies participated in a MEG or task force. The units operated in 63 of Illinois 102 counties, serving a combined population of more than 6 million. The analysis of the MEGs and task forces also includes detailed reports on each individual unit.

The main summary report includes a "Special Focus" section on the impact of methamphetamine in the areas covered by the drug enforcement units. The report provides detailed information on meth-related arrests, drug submissions to state labs, meth lab seizures, and treatment.

The report, "Assessing Illinois' Metropolitan Enforcement Groups and Task Forces," and separate profiles of each unit are available on the Authority's website at www.icjia.state.il.us, or by calling the Authority's Criminal Justice Information Clearinghouse, 312-793-8550.

users will usually start out snorting the drug. After building up a tolerance they will switch to smoking to get the same high, and eventually they begin injecting the drug. "Usually, if they've been doing it for any time, they turn to needles," he said.

Meth users tend to be volatile and extremely paranoid, Oliverio said. He has noticed that they seem to have a fascination with weapons and homemade bombs, and their homes are often heavily fortified. The task force confiscated 71 weapons last year, most of them connected to meth arrests.

Increasingly, his task force agents are finding homes with meth labs that have been outfitted with small surveillance cameras outside, which are hooked up to TV monitors inside so the meth user can watch anyone approaching the house.

It's the type of behavior that makes drug enforcement agents extremely uneasy about what they may be walking

into when they are approaching a suspected meth lab. "You always worry about officer safety, but you worry about them a lot more when they are going to a meth lab," Oliverio said.

Environmental hazard

And it's not just the paranoid meth users that are a problem; the entire process of making meth, known as "cooking," is extremely dangerous. Numerous volatile chemicals are used and stored in assorted household containers that weren't intended for that purpose. Meth lab explosions and fires are common. The chemical ingredients are toxic, the fumes from the production are toxic, and the waste that is leftover and usually carelessly dumped is toxic.

The U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy, in a November 2003 fact sheet, pointed out that producing one pound of meth leaves behind five to seven pounds of toxic waste, which is often dumped down household drains, in yards, or in rural areas.

To investigate and gather evidence at meth lab sites, officers have to take a course and become meth lab-certified. At meth lab sites they have to wear special protective clothing and a breathing apparatus or facemask. Most of the task force officers are lab-certified, but most officers in small police departments are not. If police outside a task force area come across a lab, and they don't have a lab-certified officer, they have to call the federal Drug Enforcement Administration to handle the case.

When any investigation of a meth lab site is complete, private companies that specialize in hazardous waste removal

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Publications

The disproportionate incarceration of African Americans for drug offenses in the U.S.

This research bulletin focuses on national trends in arrests and incarcerations for drug offenses. The report describes the unstinting growth in the country's prison population attributable mainly to increases in the number of persons sentenced to prison for drug offenses and how these increases have disproportionately involved African Americans.

The use of probationer alcohol and substance abuse treatment services in Illinois

This research bulletin focuses on the estimated proportion of juvenile and adult probationers who received publicly funded drug treatment services in Illinois at some time during the period 1996-2000. Sponsored by the Illinois Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (OASA), the study was designed to collect data on offenders' actual use of OASA-funded alcohol and drug treatment services in Illinois. The findings focus on differences in the areas of race, gender, offense, employment, marital status, age, and probation outcomes.

Understanding and addressing female delinquency in Illinois

This research report enhances current information on female juvenile offenders in Illinois by focusing on the particular needs of female delinquents committed to the Illinois Department of Corrections. It also provides information on the experiences of practitioners working with these females.

Sharing criminal history record information: the Interstate Identification Index

This research bulletin provides an overview of the Interstate Identification Index and highlights Illinois' participation in the system for the last decade. Approximately 25 to 30 percent of offenders have federal and state criminal history records, or criminal histories in more than one state. The FBI maintains the Interstate Identification Index—an electronic index of names and personal identification information of arrested persons that allows federal, state, and local criminal justice agencies to conduct interstate criminal records searches directly and get almost immediate access to those records.

Research

Evaluation of the Chicago Public School's Peer Jury Program

An evaluation will begin this spring focusing on the Chicago Public School's Peer Jury Program and its operation and development during the 2004/2005 school year. The study will focus on three schools that implement the program, but will also involve the collection of some general descriptive data pertaining to the program as a whole. The evaluation will assist program practitioners and technical support staff in improving the program, and assist Chicago Public School's administrative staff in making future decisions regarding the program. In addition, the study will contribute to research examining restorative justice and programming for minors.

Website statistics

As the statewide clearinghouse for statistics and other information about the criminal justice system, the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit responded to more than 1,200 requests for information in 2003. Fifty-two percent of these requests were originated electronically via e-mail or through the Authority website (www.icjia.state.il.us). There were more than 175,000 visitors to the website in 2003 and 285,893 downloads of publications and information. These downloads were in addition to the 70,242 publications sent out by Authority staff to people who made requests.

The Criminal Justice Dispatch automatically notifies registered users via e-mail twice monthly of the website's newest information. The e-mail contains direct links to new content. At the end of 2003, more than 1,400 users were registered with CJ Dispatch—double the number of users that were registered when the service was made available in fall 2001.

Needs assessment study

The Authority will send out a request for proposals (RFP) to conduct a criminal justice needs assessment in Illinois. The primary purpose of this study is to supply information that will demonstrate the needs of criminal justice organizations, and identify areas that need improvement. The information will also be used to guide decision-making regarding where to best allocate resources. A secondary pur-

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are called in to clean up. The companies, which are under contract with DEA, are paid with specially designated federal funds. If those funds run out, meth lab clean ups could place a tremendous burden on local and state governments. A basic clandestine meth lab site can cost anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars to clean up.



Photo provided by Southeastern Illinois Drug Task Force

These meth lab items were seized by task force agents.

Difficult to investigate

The small-time meth labs that have popped up in rural Illinois are part of a drug culture much different from that of marijuana and cocaine. Most notably, very little money is exchanged. For the most part, the producer and users are just making enough meth so they can get high, and they aren't selling much of it, Oliverio said.

Since they aren't selling, the meth producers typically don't have any assets that the police can seize. It's almost like a nonprofit private club, and it presents unique challenges for law enforcement. They have become reactive when it comes to meth instead of proactive.

With marijuana and cocaine there is a distribution system, and police use a traditional proactive pyramid-style investigation to make cases. Using confidential sources and undercover agents to make drug purchases, police will bust the street dealers at the bottom of the pyramid and use them to go after bigger dealers higher in the drug operation.

Oliverio and Guess said those types of investigations don't work with the meth they are seeing in central and southern Illinois. They can't send an undercover agent or confidential source into someone's house with \$100 expecting to buy a gram of meth and leave.

"Everybody is just cooking it and using it. It doesn't get sold in the manner we're used to seeing in law enforcement," Oliverio said.

The person cooking the meth is usually an addict, the task force commanders

said. The cook will share the meth he makes with acquaintances who go out and get the relatively inexpensive ingredients.

"We haven't come across one cook who's making meth who's not an addict, and you don't have that with coke and weed," Guess said.

Since everyone involved is using and often an addict, they are not usually much help with an investigation. "Very seldom can you trust these guys. It's almost impossible to use them for any type of informant, as snitches or stuff, because it just doesn't work," Guess said.

The drug enforcement agents mostly react to tips when it comes to meth. They spend a lot of time conducting seminars and educating patrol officers, firefighters, healthcare workers, and other public service workers. As a result, they get calls and tips from officers who have made routine traffic stops and found meth-making materials, fire officials who have been at suspicious fires that may have been caused by a meth lab, and others who suspect they encountered a meth lab or the materials to make one.

Oliverio said that as part of his education effort he tells public health workers and others who visit homes that if they see a propane tank with a green handle on it and they smell ammonia, they should leave the house immediately. Those are signs of a meth lab. The propane tank is used to hold stolen anhydrous ammonia, and the green color on the handle comes from the ammonia corroding the brass.

Common ingredients

Anhydrous ammonia, a common fertilizer, is an important ingredient for manufacturing meth. It is plentiful in large storage tanks on farms and at distribution plants in rural areas. Because the tanks are often in remote areas, it is relatively easy to break into the tanks and steal a small amount of ammonia.

Guess said he may get two to three calls a week from ammonia plant operators reporting thefts. But the plants are usually so spread out and in such remote areas that it is almost impossible to catch the thieves. Task force agents have even set up surveillance at the plants, but word quickly gets around in the small towns, and the meth users go someplace else, Guess said.

The primary ingredient for making methamphetamine is pseudoephedrine, which is commonly found in over-the-counter cold medicines. Recently, major drug store chains have taken measures to limit the amount of cold medicines a person can buy at one time, but that just presents more of an inconvenience for meth users than a real deterrent. "Instead of one stop they'll make six stops," Oliverio said.

Meth facts

From the Office of National Drug Control Policy

Methamphetamine is a highly addictive central nervous system stimulant that can be injected, snorted, smoked, or ingested orally. Methamphetamine users feel a short yet intense "rush" when the drug is initially administered. The effects of methamphetamine include increased activity, decreased appetite, and a sense of well being that can last from 20 minutes to 12 hours. The drug has limited medical uses for the treatment of narcolepsy, attention deficit disorders, and obesity.¹

Methamphetamine can easily be manufactured in clandestine laboratories using store bought materials and is the most prevalent synthetic drug manufactured in the United States. The ease of manufacturing methamphetamine and its highly addictive potential has caused the use of the drug to increase throughout the Nation. The methamphetamine problem was originally concentrated in the West but has spread throughout almost every major metropolitan area in the U.S. with the exception of the Northeast.²

¹ National Institute on Drug Abuse, Research Report: Methamphetamine: Abuse and Addiction, January 2002

² Drug Enforcement Administration, Drug Trafficking in the United States, Methamphetamine section

The task force agents also get occasional tips from drug store employees suspicious of people buying large quantities of cold medicines.

Meth cooks have become more sophisticated in their operations, and they have also become more mobile. Instead of setting up a lab in a house, they may put the ingredients in a van or trunk of a car and go out into the country to cook the meth.

"Our meth cooks are much more efficient. They want to keep it small, concealable and disposable," Bray said.

Originated in west

When methamphetamine first appeared on the U.S. drug scene, it was primarily associated with motorcycle gangs out west. In the 1990s, Mexican drug organizations began mass-producing high-quality meth in "superlabs" in Mexico and Southern California. Lately, much of the production has shifted to Northern California as a result of law enforcement efforts in the south, according to the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

More recently, and driven largely by how easy and relatively inexpensive it is to make meth, it has become popular with small, independent producers. Working from makeshift labs set up in their homes or other locations, these manufacturers, who are mostly Caucasians, make small batches of meth, according to the DEA. Unlike the labs that Oliverio and Guess have been encountering in Illinois, many of these independent, clandestine labs in other parts of the country are set up to profit from meth production.

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Research continued

pose of this study is to provide information that outlines if, and how, the needs of criminal justice organizations have changed over time by comparing the data collected as part of this study to the results of a needs assessment survey conducted in 1996. Major components of the criminal justice system will be surveyed on topics such as workload demands, training needs, staff retention, information systems, and programming.

Sheridan Correctional Center

Research and Analysis Unit staff members are participating in the development and evaluation of the Sheridan Correctional Center, which opened in January. Sheridan operates as a fully dedicated therapeutic community for inmates in need of substance abuse treatment. Sheridan will provide all participants access to a wide array of services, including substance abuse treatment, education, and vocational programming. The program will also prepare inmates for release into the community and provide access to services and support following their release.

In addition to Authority staff, a number of organizations assisted in the development of Sheridan, including treatment agencies, governmental agencies, community organizations, national experts, and inmates. The prison will operate at a capacity of 1,300 inmates and include males that are projected to serve between six and 30 months, be eligible for placement in a medium security facility, and be in need of substance abuse treatment.

The evaluation of Sheridan will be a collaborative effort between the Authority and the Illinois Department of Corrections, and will be guided by an Evaluation Advisory Committee. The process and impact evaluation will involve extensive quantitative data collection and qualitative information from focus groups and interviews with staff and participants. The evaluation will seek to measure changes in participant attitudes, beliefs and psychological functioning, in addition to participants' preparedness for release. The study also will examine the extent and nature of institutional violations and measures of recidivism after release. Employment and access to services also will be studied.

Grants

Local Law Enforcement Block Grants

The Authority received just more than \$1 million to administer the **Local Law Enforcement Block Grant (LLEBG) program** in federal fiscal year 2003. LLEBG funding may be used for purposes of reducing crime and improving public safety. Proposals from local agencies were due in February and awards will be announced this spring.

National Criminal History Information Improvement Program

About \$1.7 million was received to administer the **National Criminal History Information Improvement Program (NCHIP)** in FFY03. NCHIP was established in 1995 to promote the accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of criminal history records.

Project Safe Neighborhoods

The Authority received nearly \$1.7 million in federal funding to administer the **Project Safe Neighborhoods** program in the northern and central Illinois districts. Project Safe Neighborhoods was established to reduce gun crime by networking existing local programs that target gun crime and providing those programs with additional tools necessary to be successful.

National Forensic Sciences Improvement Act

About \$150,000 was received to administer the **National Forensic Sciences Improvement Act (NFSIA)** in Illinois in federal fiscal year 2003. NFSIA program provides funding to crime laboratories and medical examiner's offices to improve the quality and timeliness of forensic science or medical examiner services. Awards are based on population and crime statistics and may be used for expenses related to facilities, personnel, computerization, equipment, supplies, accreditation, and training.

Over the past couple of years meth appears to have made inroads into Chicago. Of the meth seized and submitted to Illinois State Police labs for analysis in 2002, 26 percent of the samples were from Chicago. In 2003, 19 percent of the samples submitted for testing were from Chicago.

Chicago is considered by the DEA to be a transit hub for meth from labs in Mexico and California going to other points. It also is a major transit point for illegal shipments of pseudoephedrine from Canadian chemical companies. Chicago was one of 10 cities where last year U.S. and Canadian agents arrested 65 individuals targeted in a major investigation of the illegal importation of pseudoephedrine destined for meth labs in the west. Information from a DEA news release on the 18-month investigation provides some insight into the scale of the organized meth drug trade. "Approximately 14,000 pounds (108 million tablets) of pseudoephedrine...was seized during this investigation," the DEA said. "This pseudoephedrine, believed to be destined for meth labs in the western United States, would yield approximately 9,000 pounds of methamphetamine with a street value of between \$36 and \$144 million."

Efforts to combat meth

In addition to the more than \$6 million each year the Authority designates in federal funds for the multijurisdictional drug enforcement units, which use a large portion of their funding to combat meth, several state initiatives have been launched to attack the meth problem.

Project X is Gov. Rod Blagojevich's \$2.5 million initiative against methamphetamine and the drug Ecstasy. Project X is a three-pronged approach to stamping out the two drugs, putting resources into law enforcement, prevention, and treatment. The governor has also signed into law legislation cracking down on people making meth, and those who help them make or help obtain the ingredients for making meth.



Photo provided by Southeastern Illinois Drug Task Force

DEA agents remove their protective gear after a meth lab bust at an apartment complex next to a farm service plant. The meth "cook" had access to a convenient supply of anhydrous ammonia.

Attorney General Lisa Madigan has taken an active role in a meth awareness campaign focusing on anhydrous ammonia theft and how to safeguard ammonia tanks. The Attorney General's Office recently added a "MethNet" feature on its website that provides information on meth in Illinois and efforts to combat the problem (www.ag.state.il.us).

According to the drug agents on the front lines fighting meth, it's going to take education and prevention to stem the tide of the drug, because law enforcement efforts alone won't be enough. As Oliverio described it, "it's like the proverbial finger in the dike." Despite their hard work and long hours, there is only so much the task force agents can do with their limited manpower and resources.

"I don't see any end to it any time soon," said Oliverio. "My personal feeling is you have to educate people not to want to do it."

Guess agreed that education is the key to stopping meth. And since it is one of the most difficult drugs to get off once you become addicted, longer and more intense treatment programs will also be needed.

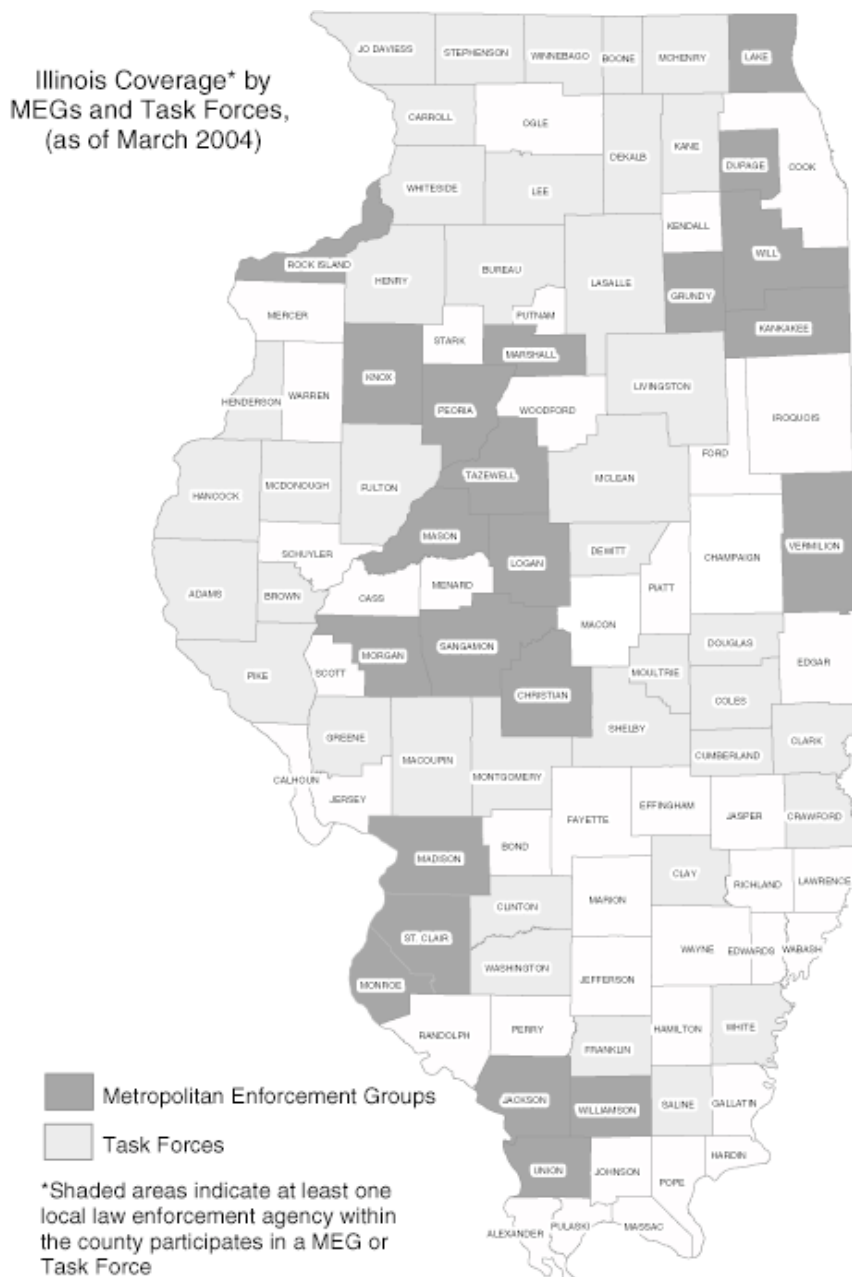
Still, Guess said, the task force agents are helping to keep meth from becoming an even bigger problem in their areas, and they are seeing results from their education efforts. "We're definitely having an impact on the community," he said. "Are we stopping the meth epidemic? No, not really." ■

Multijurisdictional drug enforcement units in Illinois

The Authority, using federal money allocated under the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, helps fund 20 multijurisdictional drug enforcement units in Illinois. (There had been 21 units before Task Force X in Macon and Champaign counties disbanded last year.) These units operate in 61 of the state's 102 counties. The units are organized as either metropolitan enforcement

groups (MEGs) or drug task forces. In 2003, nearly 200 police agencies were participating in a MEG or task force and nearly 300 local, state and federal officers were assigned to the various units.

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Technology

The Illinois Integrated Justice Information Systems (IIJIS) Project is continuing to move forward. Members of an IIJIS working group are reviewing privacy and confidentiality laws and regulations as they concern the electronic exchange of justice information among Illinois justice agencies. A final report on that work will contain an explanation of Illinois' current privacy environment, as well as recommendations for change.

The IIJIS Planning and Policy Committee is developing a "Concept of Operations" for an Illinois Homeland Security Scenario. The purpose of this document is to establish the parameters for future information sharing practices to enhance homeland security and produce several outcomes, including:

- Improved dissemination of government-issued threat warnings and alerts.
- Improved public/private knowledge distribution of homeland security information.
- Expanded wireless communications systems.
- Assurance of confidentiality, integrity, and availability of public and private sector data.
- Enhanced surveillance and intelligence.
- Improved coordination among government agencies to manage threats and the integration of systems and data to share information.
- Increased ability to create and share actionable and relevant information.
- Increased ability to discern indicators of terrorist activity amid overwhelming amounts of information.

The work of the IIJIS Technical Committee has focused on identifying and assessing integration implementation strategies that have been carried out successfully in other states. One such strategy is a Justice Network Portal that serves as a single point of access to state and county-level subject record repositories. The portal could provide a search engine for specific user classes (law enforcement officers, prosecutors, probation officers, judges, etc.) with the capability to select which types of databases are searched. Staff are analyzing feasibility issues associated with this type of integration solution.

An IIJIS 2004 Annual Report, detailing the overall progress of the project, will be submitted to the Governor and the Illinois General Assembly by April 1.

Created by state statute specifically to enforce drug laws, certain weapons violations and street gang-related offenses, **MEGs** must include at least two local law enforcement agencies. At least half of their funding must come from the participating local agencies. In addition to federal grants, the units also receive general revenue funds from the state. MEGs must make reports to the Illinois State Police, and the units typically include ISP officers. MEGs are governed by policy boards made up of officials from the participating agencies.

The 10 MEGs in Illinois are “stand-alone” operations. They cooperate with other agencies, but work independently. Administrative details are handled by the individual MEGs, spe-

cifically, by the officers designated as directors and assistant directors of the units. The units are often housed in their own facilities, usually rented or leased office space. The MEG directors are selected from any of the participating agencies by the unit’s policy board.

MEGs generally target low- to mid-level drug dealers. The agents frequently work with local police departments to address pressing drug enforcement needs. The units are also authorized to investigate street gang activity.

Drug task forces are established through interagency agreements between local agencies and the Illinois State Police (ISP). Task forces do not receive state general revenue funds. These units do not have to limit their

operations to the enforcement of drug laws, but must perform those functions to qualify for the federal anti-drug money administered by the Authority. Like MEGs, the drug task forces typically target low- to mid-level drug dealers.

The 10 drug task forces are housed in ISP facilities, commanded by ISP officers, and governed by a policy board. Vehicles and other equipment for the task forces are provided by ISP and through grant funds. Participating local agencies contribute officers or money, depending on their particular agreement with the task force. ■

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