

Meth labs rising again in Missouri - lawmakers propose new crackdown

Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. Meth lab busts are rising again in Missouri, causing lawmakers to look for new ways to discourage the illegal drug.

The number of methamphetamine busts declined after a 2005 Missouri law limited access to the drug's main ingredient – cold medicines that contain pseudoephedrine.

But the Missouri State Highway Patrol says meth lab incidents started to go up again during the last half of 2007, and Missouri remains far and away the national leader in meth lab busts.

The mid-2005 law required products containing pseudoephedrine or ephedrine to be placed behind pharmacy counters. It also required buyers of such medicines to show photo identification, limited how much of the product people can purchase each month and required pharmacies to maintain buyer logs that are available for law enforcement to review.

Lt. Sid Conklin, assistant director of the patrol's Division of Drug and Crime Control, said meth makers are getting around the requirements by going from pharmacy to pharmacy in multiple cities, buying the maximum amount of pseudoephedrine at each place – a practice known as "smurfing." He said some meth cooks even have been hiring people to accompany them so that they also can purchase the maximum amount of the cold medicines.

Legislation by Sen. Norma Champion, R-Springfield, would require pharmacies to keep an electronic log – instead of a paper record – of people who buy pseudoephedrine. The hope is that electronic records could more quickly spot patterns in which meth makers are buying pseudoephedrine products from multiple pharmacies.