



For Immediate Release

Date: October 21, 2016

To: Barron County Media Outlets

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Methamphetamine in Barron County

The illegal drug, Methamphetamine, commonly known as Meth, has caused numerous problems for Barron County over the past year. Meth related law enforcement arrests in 2015 averaged more than three per week. Numbers in 2016 are on trend to surpass that. In 2015, over 1.2 million dollars was spent by the Barron County Department of Health and Human Services on meth related services. 2015 also showed that 50% of children placed in foster care or with relatives due to unsafe conditions in the home, were placed due to meth related issues. To date in 2016, that number has risen to over 70%.

“The use of methamphetamine in Barron County is rising at a disturbing rate, states Sheriff Chris Fitzgerald. Not only in Barron County but in all of Northwestern Wisconsin. The meth problem in our area is much greater than any one agency or county can tackle, he continued. We need to work together to keep our kids and communities safe”.

In response to the growing meth problem, Barron County has established a local meth task force and participates in a regional task force. Representatives from 11 counties in northwestern Wisconsin meet regularly to assess, share information and plan initiatives to help stop the meth epidemic. The group is currently working with the Wisconsin Department of Justice and the office of the Attorney General to plan a Statewide Meth Summit to be held in late January, 2017.

“It is imperative that we inform and educate local, regional and state stakeholders, says Sarah Turner, Prevention Specialist with the Barron County Community Coalition. Many times resources are focused on the southern part of the state. It is time to bring attention to the havoc that meth is wreaking on the children, families and communities of Northern Wisconsin. We need help and we cannot do it alone”.

The local Barron County task force consists of representatives from law enforcement, health and human services, public health and the local community coalition. The group has been working on many local initiatives. An all new Meth hotline, 715-537-METH was set up for residents to report any suspected meth related incidents, including child endangerment or to seek help for addiction. Another resource for Barron County residents was also created. The, *kNOw Meth Barron County* Facebook page. This page provides community education and shares details about the latest task force initiatives. Meth Town Hall Meetings are also being held in communities throughout Barron County to discuss the present burden of meth, what actions are being taken, what community members can do, and answer questions that residents present. Additionally, the task force is working with schools and other youth serving organizations to prevent methamphetamine use and gather data to help understand why people begin using this substance.

Barron County has also partnered with Burnette, Polk, Rusk and Washburn counties to invite local stakeholders to a joint meeting to look at what they can do to improve the meth problems in their communities and all of northwestern Wisconsin address the issue. The meeting will be held on November 30th in Rice Lake.

For more information and to learn more about what you can do to help stop the meth epidemic in Barron County, a town hall meeting will be held on November 15th at Red Cedar Church in Rice Lake at 6:30 pm. All are invited and welcome to attend.

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