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Drug abuse report released

by James Phillips

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A report released Friday shows work done by the Alabama Legislature has had a major impact on reducing methamphetamine production in the state.

The report, which was released by the Subcommittee of the Alabama Drug Abuse Task Force, showed sales of Pseudoephedrine (PSE)/ephedrine have gone down in Alabama, while blocked sales of the drug have gone up.

Lawmakers passed legislation in 2012 that made several changes in how Pseudoephedrine — a major component in meth — could be purchased in the state. The drug can now only be purchased in a pharmacy, and someone purchasing the drug must have a valid Alabama driver's license. Pharmacies are also using the National Precursor Log Exchange system (NPLEx) to electronically track the purchases of the drug.

The report compares total grams sold January through March 2012 to the same time period this year. Last year, 917,474.899 grams were sold compared to 856,229.230 this year.

A blocked sale is when a retailer blocks the sale of the drug that would exceed any law, which is 3.6 grams per day and 7.5 grams in 30 days, according to federal law.

When a transaction is submitted by a retailer that would exceed the limits, a message is instantly sent to the retailer recommending denial of the sale.

During the first quarter of 2013, blocked sales totaled 69,121.334, compared to 48,194.852 in 2012.

Sen. Greg Reed (R-Jasper), a member of the eight-person subcommittee, said he feels the analysis shows the changes made are helping to fight the meth problem across Alabama.

“We recognized the problem with meth was a terrible crisis,” he said. “It’s a crisis here in my district as well as around the state. We looked at our options and went with what we thought was the best way to attack the problem.”

The study showed Walker County as the No. 7 county for per capita sold PSE/ephedrine products in the first quarter of 2012. During that time period, total grams sold in the county were 19,191.4.

During the same time period in 2013, Walker County is now in the Top 10 counties for per capita blocked PSE/ephedrine products.

“The numbers are proof that this is working right here in Walker County,” Reed said. “We are not finished. We still have a serious problem with meth here, and

we will continue to work to see what more can be done to solve this issue.”

The report also used information from the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences and the Alabama Narcotics Officers Association to show the number of meth labs in Alabama have dropped significantly from the first half of 2011 to now

Walker County District Attorney Bill Adair said he has not witnessed a decrease in this area.

“Our number of meth cases have not dropped,” he said. “Personally, I would like to see Pseudoephedrine made a controlled substance so people would need a prescription to buy it. I understand the Legislature couldn’t reach a consensus on that, so they did what they could. It’s helped some, but we still have a major problem.”

Barry Matson, chairman of the Alabama Drug Abuse Task Force and member of the subcommittee, said the report is proof that law enforcement, industry and political leadership can come together on a policy to have a positive impact on the state.

“Unfortunately, until demand for meth is reduced, illegal meth use (and all of its peripheral social ills) will continue to prevail in Alabama and across the country,” he said. “The ADATF and its subcommittees will continue to strive for ways to prevent diversion of PSE/ephedrine medications.”

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