

## Oklahoma Meth-Lab Busts Drop

*Curbs on key ingredient credited; some say drug makers will target Texas.*

Methamphetamine lab busts in Oklahoma have dropped more than 70% since a new state law restricted access to a key ingredient, fueling fears that producers of the illicit drug could spill across the Red River into Texas.

The Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Control reported that the number of raids fell from 100 in March to 29 in May – a decline authorities attribute to the statute signed into law April 6 that limits supplies of pseudoephedrine. With successes reported in Oklahoma, at least 11 states, including Texas, are eyeing similar laws to restrict pseudoephedrine sales.

Wichita Falls police now report an increase in Oklahomans seeking to buy the tablets, which are a common cold medication.

The Oklahoma law limits the amount of pseudoephedrine a person may buy in a 30-day period to 9 grams. It also requires that pharmacies secure the drug behind counters or in locked cases and that purchasers provide photo IDs and signatures. Many small-time producers go store to store buying whatever amounts that merchants will sell. It takes 23,000 tablets of pseudoephedrine to make 2.4 pounds of meth, but producers make only a couple of ounces at a time.

Those arrested with methamphetamine can now be held without bail under the new Oklahoma law, pending an assessment of their addiction. The Oklahoma law can be traced to the deaths in recent years of three state troopers, all killed by people high on methamphetamine.

### **Texas to follow suit ?**

In Texas, Rep. Leo Berman, R-Tyler, hopes to push a similar bill through as an emergency measure in next year's legislative session.

“It's just a matter of time before the problem spreads,” said Dan Easterwood, assistant commander for the Texas Department of Public Safety's drug squad.

Meth producers, he said, tend to be small-time dealers trying to support their own addictions – which means the people from Oklahoma are going to be bringing a slew of other problems.

“It causes anxiety and extreme paranoia,” Mr. Easterwood said. “Guns and meth go hand in hand.”

Meth use dropped in the 1980s after federal legislation blocked access to chemicals and equipment needed for large-scale production. It resurfaced after a more simple process was developed that allowed producers to extract the drug from common cold medicine. 🌀