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SCHAKOWSKY WARNS OF METH'S ENVIRONMENTAL, HEALTH IMPACTS

METH PRODUCTION POLLUTES AIR, CREATES TOXIC WASTE, AND RUINS LIVES

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky today warned of the harmful impact of methamphetamine production on the environment and on individuals in a joint hearing before the House Subcommittees on Health and Environment and Hazardous Materials.

Representative Schakowsky noted that the harmful impact of meth extends beyond its users; methamphetamine production impacts the environment by contaminating the air and creating toxic waste.

The full text of Representative Schakowsky's opening statement is below:

Methamphetamine is perhaps the most destructive and hazardous drug we have ever had to confront. It is easy and inexpensive to make, extremely potent, and highly addictive. Meth is dangerous to manufacture and dangerous to use. Every year it destroys thousands of American's lives. It hurts pregnant women and places children and the environment at grave risk of harm. Meth use leads to the spread of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B and C. It is a drug that endangers law enforcement and first responders. It saps our financial and human resources. Meth seems to destroy everything and everyone in its path.

The health effects of meth on its users have become well known. The use of this drug does great harm to the body, especially the heart and lungs. The effects of methamphetamine on the developing fetus are severe and life threatening. Studies suggest that meth use during pregnancy may result in prenatal complications, increased rates of premature delivery, and altered neonatal behavioral patterns.

The process of people manufacturing or "cooking" methamphetamine in thousands of clandestine laboratories across the nation produces a toxic cloud of dangerous chemicals. These chemicals spread through the entire house or apartment, and seep into the drywall and carpeting. Every pound of meth manufactured produces up to six pounds of toxic meth waste - waste that meth makers routinely pour down drains, toss onto roadsides, or dump in ditches or farm fields. Every location where meth makers deposit meth waste becomes a toxic waste site that may endanger not only the natural environment but also anyone who comes into contact with the waste.

There is no question that this nation needs a comprehensive strategy to deal with meth. We need to reduce demand for this drug by educating Americans about its dangers. We need to find and fund effective ways to prevent and treat meth addiction. We also need to make sure that there is a national plan in place to deal with the environmental impacts of methamphetamines. And we need more funding for enforcement, especially in high-activity areas.

Illinois' Attorney General Lisa Madigan is working on a comprehensive plan to address the serious problem of meth use in our state. An essential part of that plan is to move cold medicine behind the counter in a way that does not inconvenience the legitimate consumer. As this committee continues to address this issue we should not consider any legislative solution that sets mandatory minimums, which unfairly limit the discretion of judges and ignore the need for judges to consider all factors, especially in the case of first-time or low-level offenders. I believe that investing in drug prevention and treatment would be a more effective strategy. I am hopeful that this committee will be able to tackle this serious problem.