



## Documentary Highlights Montana's Meth Problem

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By: Hope Stockwell

Be prepared to cringe, cover your eyes and grip your seat if you watch HBO's documentary on methamphetamine abuse in Montana, which has one of the highest meth use rates in the country.

In a scene from the film, Graham, 16, says meth "is just really available" in Kalispell and the Flathead Valley.

"It's just so prevalent here," he says. "It's the drug to do and it's not just us punk teenagers. A lot of people are doing this."

The film follows Graham and 22-year-old Crystal — who says she has used meth for three years — on a snowy night as they drive to a dark corner of a strip-mall parking lot. Crystal injects meth into a vein in her neck.

"I can't feel my face, yeah, whew, it's the best feeling the world, yeah, it's like the biggest rush in the world, you can't hear for a little bit, can't breathe, can't see," Crystal says in the film. "People don't understand how we could get addicted to this. But I feel so good right now, better than any sober person has felt their whole entire life, that's what they don't know."

As the scene played out recently on a massive screen set up in the Montana Legislature, giving lawmakers a sneak peak, mouths dropped open and eyes popped. Some wonder how Montana will be perceived when the documentary hits HBO.

"It's like acknowledging a family problem," says Rep. Teresa Henry. "Where you think if we just don't talk about it, it will go away or it will reflect badly on the family. And the reality is a significant number of members of our community family are in trouble and are struggling and we all need to respond to it."

State Attorney General Mike McGrath, who calls the film "extremely powerful," says it's sad because of the personal tragedies it reveals.

The documentary's director, Eames Yates hopes those stories will help mobilize a national campaign against meth.

"It seems like few people know what to do, which is get this thing out in the open," he says. "It's like birth control or fighting AIDS or something, the more you get it out there, the more you show it, the more people learn how to deal with it, how to recognize it."

Montana has tried to deal with its meth problem by locking cold medicine behind pharmacy counters and building meth treatment facilities. Now, former state Sen. Don Hargrove is asking the legislature to help pay for a graphic TV ad campaign created by the Montana Meth Project. Hargrove says it's the only program focused on prevention:

"We spend more money on our meth problem in Montana than probably any other single challenge we have, except for education," he says. "And if it's just incarceration we spend \$30,000 a year and then we turn out an institutionalized convicted felon, who's still a junkie."

Hargrove thinks the documentary could be life-changing for some. Last week, Hargrove attended a screening where he says Crystal, the woman who injected meth into her neck, told the audience the film had been a wakeup call for her. She's now staying clean.

*Hope Stockwell reports for Montana Public Radio.*