



## UNITE unveils MethCheck

**By CHRIS HARRIS CJ Staff Writer**

Area drug enforcement agency Operation UNITE is utilizing a unique program to offer law enforcement agencies the ability to instantly track sales to potential methamphetamine manufacturers — and the results have been successful enough to possibly take statewide.

Named MethCheck, a real-time electronic log runs suspicious buyer reports daily on those purchasing pseudoephedrine, the key ingredient in making the illegal drug known commonly as meth, and keeps tab on purchase limits.

"Prior to using this system, I would spend almost a full day traveling to all the participating pharmacies and making copies of manual logs before returning to my office to look at the data," said Det. Brian Lewis, who coordinates the program for UNITE. "A process that took two days now takes only 10 minutes."

MethCheck first debuted in Laurel County in November of 2005, the first location in the country to get the program. Since then, use of the system has resulted in the discovery of 17 methamphetamine labs, 42 individuals with criminal charges against them (including 18 exceeding the state's monthly limit on pseudoephedrine purchases), and continuing investigation of 14 other individuals. Additionally, MethCheck has assisted local and federal agencies in investigating 25 other suspects.

"It's been very easy to implement. From our end, it's been simple to use," said Leslie Rogers, pharmacist at the London Kroger store, one of 14 pharmacies in the area to utilize MethCheck. "It was a very tedious, time-consuming process, a mountain of paperwork. (MethCheck has) really streamlined the process. It is definitely a good thing."

She added that the system is more accurate than the manual logs that used to keep track of meth sales. Purchasers of products containing methamphetamine are required to sign a manual log listing their name, date of birth, address and other identifying information along

with a description of their purchase. MethCheck eliminates the need for cumbersome paper logs.

“We think it’s doing good and showing good results,” said Mike Davis, founder and president of Appriss, the Louisville-based technology company that developed MethCheck. “We could not have found better partners than UNITE and the Office of Drug Control Policy.”

Results have been so successful for the intended purpose, MethCheck could soon see use all over the state. Senate Bill 88, passed in the 2007 General Assembly, will require pharmacies to use electronic reporting if the state pays the cost of between \$1 million to \$3 million over a three-year period to connect all 1,290 pharmacies in Kentucky. The hope of the Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy is to have an electronic reporting system in place before the end of the year.

38 percent of Kentucky pharmacies are chain stores that account for 80 percent of pseudoephedrine sales, noted Van Ingram Drug Control Policy compliance branch manager — “so if we just find enough money to do those stores, we think we’d have an impact,” he said.

Operation UNITE (Unlawful Narcotics Investigations, Treatment and Education) was created in 2003 with aid from Rep. Hal Rogers. The regional anti-drug initiative works in 29 southern and eastern Kentucky counties to combat the use and distribution of illegal drugs. For more information about Operation UNITE, visit [www.operationunite.org](http://www.operationunite.org).