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State aid sought to battle meth

A local lawmaker says he'll ask the state to fund 10-member strike teams to target meth labs in Snohomish and Pierce counties.

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OLYMPIA - Snohomish County is stepping up its efforts to get state dollars for a special police team targeting methamphetamine labs and drug houses.

State Rep. John Lovick, D-Mill Creek, plans to ask for \$1.2 million for a 10-member meth "strike team" on Jan. 10, the first day of the state legislative session.

"My belief is this has to be my top priority next year," said Lovick, who's also a State Patrol sergeant.

The bill he plans to propose will also ask for an additional \$300,000 for treatment and other costs, Lovick said. The funds would be part of a two-year pilot project.

"Methamphetamine is destroying lives, families and communities," Lovick said. "We've got to step up and do something."

He'll ask for the same amount for meth-plagued Pierce County. Working together with that county will increase the chances of legislative success this year, Lovick said.

"I think (the bill) has a great chance," Lovick said. "We obviously have a huge budget deficit, but these drug problems in our communities need to be addressed."

He added, "If the pilot project is successful, we'll be able to make a good case for attracting federal funding."

Snohomish County has long sought dollars to start a strike team and to fund other efforts to fight meth here.

Last year, 13 state representatives asked for \$600,000 to get the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office meth strike team up and running. That effort failed.

"This year, we've got Pierce County and that means two county sheriffs and two county councils putting pressure on them," Snohomish County Sheriff Rick Bart said.

"We think we can show them it will dramatically reduce the use of methamphetamine," Bart said. "This will be one of my high priorities next year."

The proposal has the support of the Snohomish Regional Drug Task Force, Sgt. John Flood said.

"More than 50 percent of what we do is tied to some aspect of methamphetamine," he said. "The federal dollars we receive here don't cover those efforts."

Those federal funds are earmarked for high-level drug dealers. Meth cooks and users don't fit that category, so much of the work to shut down meth labs is done by overworked police forces, Flood said.

"Having this team out there specifically designed to target meth and everything associated with it would make a difference in the community," he said.

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