

New Pill Tracking System Aids in Arrest of Washington Couple

By Ed Pruneau, Missourian Managing Editor
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A new computerized pill tracking system helped county narcotics officers net a Washington couple suspected of manufacturing methamphetamine.

The man and woman were arrested Monday. Their names were not released pending a decision to issue felony charges.

It was the first case made using the MethCheck system being employed by some pharmacies in Franklin County, said Detective Sgt. Jason Grellner, commander of the Franklin County Narcotics Enforcement Unit (FCNEU). The unit is paying the cost for the system.

State and federal laws limit how much medicines containing pseudoephedrine - the key ingredient in meth - a person can buy in any month, but meth makers get around that by buying pills at multiple pharmacies and stores, a practice dubbed "smurfing."

Pharmacies are required by law to maintain paper logs whenever someone buys cold or allergy medications containing pseudoephedrine to help police track "smurfers."

The new system, developed by Apriss Inc., lets pharmacies enter information on a computer rather than in a paper logbook, and the information is processed and available to law enforcement more quickly.

Grellner said Monday, the system tagged a 44-year-old man who purchased pseudoephedrine at a pharmacy at Krakow. The man had made four purchases in Franklin County and two in St. Louis County.

When officers arrested the man, they found more pseudoephedrine in his car along with other meth lab components, some suspected methamphetamine and hypodermic needles, Grellner said.

FCNEU officers then went to the suspect's home in the 900 block of East Eighth Street where they found numerous other components including a leaking container of anhydrous ammonia in a freezer next to food, Grellner said.

Investigators said some food had been contaminated by the anhydrous ammonia.

Grellner said the new computer system indicated that the woman also had been over the limit on purchases of pseudoephedrine.