

## **EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY METH COOKS BY TRACKING PSEUDOEPHEDRINE PURCHASES TO BENEFIT FROM NEW TECHNICAL STANDARD**

*A Cooperative Venture by Pharmacists, Retailers,  
Software Developers, and Law Enforcement Authorities*

Efforts to identify methamphetamine cooks through electronic tracking of their pseudoephedrine (PSE) purchases are receiving a big boost in the form of a new technical standard developed by a workgroup of pharmacists, retailers, software developers, and law enforcement authorities and convened by the American Society for Automation in Pharmacy (ASAP).

According to ASAP Executive Director Bill Lockwood, the technical standard is designed to bring a degree of uniformity to the growing number of electronic PSE-tracking programs developed by state and local governments and law enforcement authorities across the country. "All of the players involved in these efforts benefit from a uniform standard," Lockwood says.

Tommy Farmer, head of the Tennessee Methamphetamine Task Force and a member of the ASAP workgroup, agrees. "When our task force started tracking PSE purchases, we had to create technical specifications for each and every piece of data we wanted to collect," Farmer says. "With the ASAP standard in place, that is no longer a concern. Once a state or local agency has identified what data to collect, it can instruct pharmacies and retailers to report the data according to the ASAP standard. Law enforcement doesn't have to reinvent the wheel, and pharmacies don't have to comply with multiple standards."

The ASAP standard will also facilitate sharing of PSE purchase data, according to Scott Serich of the Integrated Justice Information Institute (IJIS), who co-chaired the workgroup with ASAP's Lockwood. As Serich explains, "The ASAP PSE standard will contribute to the development of interstate sharing capabilities by ensuring common formats for the PSE purchase data on which the interstate exchanges will be built."

Steve Mange, Senior Policy Advisor to Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, and a member of the workgroup, cautioned that the ASAP standard does not dictate what information a PSE-tracking system should collect, beyond what the federal Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act (CMEA) requires. "It is up to state and local governments to decide what additional data to collect," Mange says. "The ASAP standards simply say that if you decide to collect a certain piece of information — a driver's license number, for example — then here is the technical format you should use."

The ASAP standard is designed to be flexible:

- It will work with systems that simply collect PSE purchase data and pass it along to law enforcement authorities, such as the system in Tennessee — regardless of whether the data is collected in real time or on a periodic (e.g., weekly) basis.
- It will work with systems that collect PSE purchase data in real time only and use it to stop sales above legal limits, such as the system in Oklahoma.
- It will work for pharmacies and for nonpharmacy retailers that sell PSE products.
- It can handle batch-file transmissions of PSE purchases, web-based reporting through web portals or web servers, and reporting through company-specific point-of-sale systems.

The development of the ASAP PSE-tracking standard grew out of a meeting of law enforcement officials and others in March 2007 that was sponsored by the National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws (NAMSDL), with support from the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, United States Department of Justice. The meeting resulted in the formation of the NAMSDL Methamphetamine Precursor Tracking Advisory Committee, and several members of that committee made significant contributions to the development of this standard.

ASAP is a national nonprofit organization representing the interests of companies providing technology-based systems and related services to pharmacies in the United States. ASAP has developed the electronic reporting standard that is in widespread use by prescription-monitoring programs. Like the prescription-monitoring standard, the new PSE-tracking standard contributes to state and national efforts to ensure the proper use of both prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs and to combat the unlawful diversion, manufacture, misuse, and abuse of such drugs.

The ASAP PSE-tracking standard is available on a CD or as a PDF to ASAP members for \$125. The cost for nonmembers is \$620.

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