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# County of San Diego Methamphetamine Strike Force

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## NEWS ADVISORY

Strike Force Recognizes Crucial Rehabilitation Tool:

### **DRUG COURTS ACHIEVE RECORD METH REHAB RATES**

**San Diego-** Statistically, 37-year-old Eileen Gaffney should be behind bars, most likely for a repeat methamphetamine-related offense. Instead, the former "crystal" addict from Pacific Beach will leave her full-time workplace a little early this week. She'll join 20 other recovering meth addicts who have successfully completed the rigorous guidelines of the innovative, but still experimental, San Diego County Drug Courts.

Since their inception more than two years ago, the drug courts have successfully rehabilitated larger and larger groups of meth offenders. **On Wednesday, September 15 at 6 PM at the Lakeside Community Center, the East County Drug Court will drop the criminal charges of 21 recovering meth users at the court's largest graduation ceremony yet.**

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**Participating Agencies:**

- County of San Diego
- Board of Supervisors
- Chief Administrative Office
- District Attorney's Office
- Environmental Health Services
- Health and Human Services Agency
  - AIDS Coordination
  - Alcohol and Drug Services
  - Emergency Medical Services
  - Health Services
  - Mental Health Services
  - Social Services
- Media and Public Relations
- Medical Examiner
- Municipal Courts
- Probation Department
- Sheriff's Department
- Alliance Healthcare Foundation
- Alcohol and Drug Advisory Board
- Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement
- California Border Alliance Group
- California State Department of Corrections
- CRASH, Inc.
- Drug Enforcement Administration
- El Cajon Valley School District
- Hospital Council of San Diego/Imperial County
- Institute for Health Advocacy
- Kearny Mesa Regional Recovery Center
- McAllister Institute
- Mercy Healthcare of San Diego
- Office of the City Attorney, San Diego
- Office of National Drug Control Policy
- Office of the United States Attorney, Seventh District
- Palavra Tree, Inc.
- Parent Teachers Association, 9th District
- PARTS
- Pathfinders of San Diego, Inc.
- San Diego Association of Governments
- San Diego City College
- San Diego City Schools
- San Diego County Office of Education
- San Diego Freedom Ranch
- San Diego/Imperial County Narcotics Information Network
- San Diego City Police Department
- San Diego State University
- Scripps McDonald Center
- Stepping Stone
- United States Customs Services
- University of California, San Diego

The group reflects the unparalleled success the drug courts have experienced treating non-violent methamphetamine offenders.

“The courts have discovered an ingenious new system that actually breaks the cycle of addiction for many hard-core, lifelong meth users,” said Patricia K. Cookson, Superior Court Judge of the East County Drug Court and member of the County of San Diego Methamphetamine Strike Force. “By monitoring our defendants with unprecedented supervision, our early success stories are nothing short of miracles,” she said.

According to county statistics, methamphetamine is the “drug of choice” for nearly 70 percent of the county’s 450 drug court participants. That figure rises to nearly 80 percent in the North and East County divisions. Of the 58 former meth users graduated from the East County Drug Court, only one has been re-arrested.

The county’s three other drug courts boast of similar achievements. The North and South County Drug Courts, for example, are celebrating their largest groups of meth graduates to date. Although data is preliminary, the North County Drug Court is reporting a 93 percent success rate; dramatically higher than the 37 percent success rate of the nation’s traditional court system according to Department of Justice figures.

“The key to the success of the drug courts is close supervision of the participant,” says Judge David W. Ryan of the North County Drug Court.

“We’ve got treatment counselors who meet in sessions every day with the participants. We’ve got sheriff’s deputies and police officers who are in constant contact with our participants at

their homes and their work places,” he explained. “Suddenly, the judiciary system has the teeth it needs to enforce its rulings. Most importantly, our participants are made to feel like they’re worth the investment.”

The county’s four drug courts operate alongside traditional Superior Court departments in the courthouses of Vista, East County, Downtown, and the South County, but the proceedings are anything but conventional. Participants must plead *guilty* to their charges and *can be sent to jail at any time* during the program. In exchange, each participant is assessed for treatment needs and introduced to a team of judicial, law enforcement, and treatment specialists. From detox to job training, the team devotes itself to the participant’s rehabilitation and monitors every step of the participant’s recovery.

“The Methamphetamine Strike Force applauds the protocol of the county’s drug courts,” said Jack Drown, Undersheriff of the San Diego County Sheriff’s Department and Co-chair of the Meth Strike Force. “With unprecedented supervision of participants, frequent drug testing, and dedicated recovery specialists, the San Diego County Drug Courts are proving themselves invaluable in the fight against methamphetamine addiction,” Drown added.

Meth Strike Force Officials also highlight the money saving aspects of the program. “The drugcourt program costs about \$3,000 for each participant. It costs \$25,000 dollars to keep a drug offender in jail for up to a year,” said San Diego County Supervisor Dianne Jacob, who initiated the strike force in 1996. “The drug court program is one of the most effective drug programs in San Diego County to move people away from a life of meth addiction,” Jacob said.

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**The Methamphetamine Strike Force operates an anonymous hotline to report meth-related community problems or seek help. The hotline number is: 1-800-694-4494.**

•Before and after photographs of drug court graduates will be presented at the East County Drug Court graduation ceremony on at **6 PM Wednesday, September 15th at the Lakeside Community Center at 9841 Vine Street in Lakeside. To arrange interviews with drug court graduates, judges, or specialists please contact Jennifer Stone, Media Coordinator for the County of San Diego Methamphetamine Strike Force.**

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