

# Office of the Attorney General

## Attorney General Conway Launches Statewide Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force

**Press Release Date:** Thursday, August 20, 2009

**Contact Information:** Allison Martin  
502-696-5651 (office)  
Or  
Shelley Johnson  
502-696-5659 (office)

Attorney General Jack Conway today announced creation of the first statewide prescription drug diversion task force to combat the epidemic of prescription drug abuse in Kentucky. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) Drug Diversion Task Force, formed by General Conway in April 2009, has focused its attention in Eastern Kentucky, once considered to be the prescription pain-killer capital of the U.S. The task force includes investigators from the attorney general's Drug Investigations Branch and two additional investigators from Eastern Kentucky law enforcement agencies. General Conway is pleased to announce today that the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators (NADDI) has awarded his office a \$50,000 Seed Grant that will fund new drug diversion efforts in Eastern Kentucky and allow the task force to expand into other areas of the state.

"Prescription drug abuse has claimed far too many lives in Kentucky," said General Conway. "While this is a problem that has shattered families across the country, Kentucky led the nation in the use of prescription drugs for non-medical purposes in 2008. Prescription drug overdoses claimed more than 480 lives in Kentucky last year. With this generous grant, we can now intensify our drug diversion investigations across the Commonwealth."

General Conway hopes to add at least two additional investigators to the task force from other law enforcement agencies in Kentucky to focus on prescription drug investigations including doctor shopping, drug trafficking, overprescribing physicians and illegal out-of-state pharmacies. The NADDI grant will fund equipment, training and investigative efforts of the task force. All OAG Drug Diversion Task Force investigators will also be members of NADDI, giving them contact with thousands of other NADDI members working on similar drug investigations in other states.

"The National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators is excited to provide our seed grant, sponsored by Abbott Laboratories, to the Kentucky Attorney General's Office. We are especially pleased to be a part of the first statewide prescription drug abuse task force ever formed in Kentucky, and applaud Attorney General Jack Conway for his innovative plan to reduce prescription drug diversion in the Commonwealth," said John Burke, president of NADDI.

General Conway's office is one of seven law enforcement agencies in the nation to receive NADDI seed grants in 2009.

"At a time when other law enforcement agencies are forced to curtail their drug enforcement efforts due to budget cuts, NADDI's grant will allow us to create a comprehensive drug diversion task force that will intensify our fight against a problem that is affecting young and old across the Commonwealth," said Jennifer Carpenter, Investigator/Manager of the OAG Drug Investigations Branch.

### **AG Conway's Comprehensive Drug Diversion Effort**

Even facing 20% budget cuts, since taking office in January 2008 General Conway has devoted additional resources to address prescription drug abuse in Eastern Kentucky. As part of that effort, he met with 5th District Congressman Hal Rogers (R-Somerset) to forge a partnership that continues today with Operation Unlawful Narcotics Investigations, Treatment and Education (UNITE), an agency Rogers founded in 2005. Investigators from the Attorney General's office are now assigned to Operation UNITE. The office received the 2008 "Most Valuable Agency" award from Operation UNITE for its efforts in fighting illegal drugs. General Conway was also named a "Soaring Eagle" for his commitment to drug enforcement.

OAG investigators have also worked closely with the Appalachian High Intensity Drug Traffic Area (HIDTA) task force, U.S Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the Kentucky All Schedule Prescription Electronic Reporting (KASPER) system, administered by the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, to track controlled substance prescriptions dispensed within the state. General Conway hopes to work even more closely with KASPER investigators, who are also registered pharmacists, in statewide prescription drug investigations and drug round-ups.

Last year, General Conway lobbied lawmakers and attorneys general to support the Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act. Now law, the Ryan Haight Act makes it illegal to distribute prescription controlled substances over the Internet without a prescription provided by a doctor after an in-person evaluation. The federal law is similar to Kentucky's groundbreaking Internet Pharmacy Law passed in 2005.

"Kentucky's Internet Pharmacy Law has helped stem the influx of illegal prescription drugs into our state, but having the comprehensive federal law is imperative as we worked to curb the number of Kentuckians who traveled to other states to obtain these illegal prescription pills," said General Conway.

General Conway's office is committed to investigating and halting rogue online pharmacies that have become the new street corner for addicts looking for a fix. Many of these online pharmacies are not licensed in Kentucky, nor are they registered with the Kentucky Board of Pharmacy.

The Office of the Attorney General has also filed suit against Purdue Pharma, the manufacturer of the powerful prescription painkiller Oxycontin, for falsely marketing its product to doctors and consumers, creating addicts and tearing apart families.

### **OAG Drug Diversion Accomplishments since January 2008:**

**Cases Opened:** 257

**KASPER Requests:** 675

**Search Warrants:** 39

**Arrests:** 68/169 counts

**Indictments:** 41/238 counts

**Participated in Drug Round-ups:** 12

**Prescription Drugs Seized:** 4,397

**Prescription Drug Diversion Training:** Trained approximately 150 local law enforcement, prosecutors and health care professionals

### **About NADDI**

NADDI is a non-profit organization that facilitates cooperation between law enforcement, healthcare professionals, state regulatory agencies and pharmaceutical manufacturers in the prevention and investigation of prescription drug diversion. The NADDI seed grant is sponsored by Abbott Laboratories and is designed to encourage local and state law enforcement to dedicate at least one full-time law enforcement officer to investigate prescription drug abuse offenses.