

## [Plenty Happening During Substance Abuse Awareness Month](#)



Written by Lauren Millette

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Bump it!

Members of MATForce, Yavapai County Substance Abuse Coalition, have been busy this month with a slate of activities aimed at involving the public in decreasing substance abuse.

Law enforcement representatives

and MATForce partnered last Saturday for the annual "Dump the Drugs" event. Prescott Valley Police Department, Prescott Police Department, Chino Valley Police Department and the Yavapai County Sheriff's Offices in Mayer and Yarnell partnered with MATForce to collect and safely dispose more than 450 pounds of unwanted prescription and over-the-counter medications.



The event was sponsored to help keep potentially dangerous drugs out of the hands of teenagers, as well as out of local water sources, said MATForce Program Manager Merilee Fowler.

"We are extremely grateful to all the citizens who dropped off their unwanted medication for proper disposal," Fowler said. "They have helped promote safety for our environment and community by reducing unsafe disposal or access to these drugs. This is especially important for our teens. Research by the Partnership for Drug Free America shows that every day, 2,500 teenagers use a prescription drug to get high for the first time."

If you missed the "Dump the Drugs" event, police departments in Prescott, Prescott Valley, Chino Valley, Sedona and Cottonwood are accepting unwanted prescription medications through Friday.

### **Many Awareness Events Planned**

The event was just one of a handful of activities lined up this month to educate the public on substance abuse.



A Youth Victim Impact Panel will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. tonight at the Cottonwood Public Safety Building, 199 S. Sixth St., in Cottonwood.

And local teenagers will be participating in the annual Teen Maze tomorrow through

Friday in Prescott, where they will learn about the dangers of inhalants, alcohol and prescription drug abuse through an interactive maze set up at the Grace Sparks Community Center on Gurley Street.

Lincoln Elementary School administrators in Prescott also have been doing their part to decrease substance abuse this month with their marquis posting April Substance Abuse Awareness Month.

This month's MATForce Lunch 'n Learn teleconference gathering is scheduled from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday at the Yavapai County Administration Building, at 1015 Fair St., in Prescott, and also at the Yavapai County Cottonwood Annex, 10 South 6th St., in Cottonwood.

"Understanding Dual Diagnosis in Mental Illness and Addiction" will be the featured presentation by Patty May, M.A., L.I.S.A.C., CD, Residential Program Manager for the Verde Valley Guidance Clinic.

### **MATForce Mixer**

The annual MATForce Mixer scheduled 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. April 27 at the Prescott Resort will give the public an opportunity to learn more about the organization's accomplishments and goals and a place to pick up information on helpful community resources.

MATForce Co-Chair and County Attorney Sheila Polk said, "With an unprecedented 30 percent drop in felony offenses for Yavapai County between 2007 and 2009, we know the efforts of the hundreds of MATForce coalition members are working!"

Polk will provide an overview of MATForce and its accomplishments at 4:00 p.m. at the mixer. Elected officials plan to attend and refreshments will be provided.

Those attending will be able to speak directly with community members and professionals who volunteer their time to help raise awareness about substance abuse issues through educational programs, speakers, publications, advertising materials, professional training and resources for help.

Representatives from MATForce Workgroups will highlight their accomplishments and share plans for upcoming projects. These workgroups include: Intervention, Community Outreach, Partners in Prevention and the Underage Drinking Taskforce.

"The Underage Drinking Taskforce is working to raise awareness about the risks and consequences of underage

Drinking," Fowler said. "There has been an alarming trend among youth of mixing alcohol and prescription drugs, sometimes with fatal results.

"Building healthier communities is our goal. It takes a community working together to make a difference. That is the power of MATForce's success. We hope that this year's Mixer will bring even more community members together; increasing awareness about the risks and consequences of substance abuse," she said.

Winning videos and posters of area youth who participated in the recent MATForce Youth Video and Poster Contests will debut at the mixer and winning entrants will be honored with awards for their efforts.

More than 150 people from throughout Yavapai County attended last year's mixer.

Cottonwood City Manager and MATForce Co-Chair Doug Bartosh said, "Almost every person has been affected by substance abuse in some way. The MATForce Mixer is an excellent opportunity to learn more and help those affected. With a drop in meth use, as well as the crime rate drop, we want to celebrate success and continue our work to build a healthier community. MATForce is an outstanding grass-roots effort that is working!"

Verde Valley residents helped kick off MATForce April Substance Abuse Awareness Month with the fourth annual March Against Meth Parade and Fair March 27. Yavapai County Sheriff Steve Waugh, Cottonwood Youth Advisory Commission, Chapter 5 Sober Living, Greyhounds of Verde Valley, Big Brothers and Big Sisters were just some of the many civic, school groups, bands, clubs and businesses that participated in the parade.

"This was our biggest and best event ever!" Bartosh said.

### **MATForce Background**

MATForce was created in March 2006 as the result of an agreement among three local agencies to join forces in order to collectively address substance abuse in Yavapai County. People from all segments of the community were invited to join the coalition, including: law enforcement; the business community; schools; youth; parents and caregivers; faith-based community; government officials; youth-serving agencies; the media; healthcare agencies; the treatment community, and the recovery community.

"A county-wide strategic plan was developed in 2007 by over 70 coalition members, representing various groups, agencies and communities. Input for this plan was generated from 330 participants who attended one of 14 community forums held throughout the County. Mission and goal statements were also developed through these community forums. Each year, coalition members gather to review MATForce's goals, aligning our projects with current substance abuse issues and trends," according to the MATForce website, [www.matforce.org](http://www.matforce.org).

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