

Jury finds man guilty of methamphetamine charge

By RICK BROWN
News Tribune

Public defender Jan King likened the government to thought police for charging Travis Edgar with the intent to make methamphetamine from stolen over-the-counter medicine.

"What if a person steals lighter fluid? Do you arrest him for intent to commit arson?" King asked a Cole County jury.

The defense attorney's arguments failed to convince the panel of six men and six women during Edgar's trial on Wednesday. They convicted him on the felony drug

charge and two misdemeanor counts of stealing.

Edgar, 20, was one of four Sedalia men arrested last December in Jefferson City on suspicion of shoplifting Actifed cold medicine. Authorities also reported recovering stolen batteries from the group.

Police testified that ephedrine can be refined from the non-prescription medication and lithium can be extracted from the batteries. Those elements can then be used to cook methamphetamine.

Employees from Target and

Food 4 Less testified that the defendant was one of four men in their stores on Dec. 18, 1997. The prosecution played a security videotape from Target. It showed Edgar shoplifting three boxes of Actifed, according to an employee's testimony.

Prosecution witnesses said the four suspects then went to Food 4 Less, where employees chased them from the store to a nearby parking lot. Police arrested them there and recovered a total of 19 boxes of cold medicine and several batteries.

Officer Sterling Infield said Edgar admitted during questioning that the items were intended to produce methamphetamine. Edgar said the group planned to give the medicine and batteries to another Sedalia man who would use them, Infield testified.

However, the defense characterized the crime as nothing more than misdemeanor shoplifting.

"Mr. Edgar didn't tell the police

that the possession was for the purpose of manufacturing methamphetamine," said King. "They told him that."

King claimed police assumed Edgar planned to do something illegal simply because he possessed a perfectly legal medication. They didn't find any instructions or equipment to make methamphetamine, he noted.

"You're being punished for what's in your mind, for what you think, not what you did," King said of the drug charge.

Assistant prosecutor Bill Tackett urged the jury to consider Edgar's actions and statements to police in determining his intent. He said the group had enough cold medicine to last 128 days for one person.

The jury deliberated for less than a half hour before returning guilty verdicts. Circuit Judge Byron Kinder, who presided over the trial, will sentence Edgar later.