



METH LABS: A RECIPE FOR DISASTER

WHAT IS A METH LAB?

A meth lab is an illegal operation set up to produce the illegal stimulant, methamphetamine. There are several methods to produce methamphetamine, but they all use a variety of chemicals including explosives, solvents, metals, salts and corrosives. During the manufacturing process, additional compounds and by-products are produced. The fumes, vapors, and spillage associated with the manufacturing can be toxic.

Because it is an illegal activity, methamphetamine producers may dispose of their labs, evidence, and production waste by dumping it. And more labs are moving outdoors for production. Narcotic officers have discovered labs in cabins, lean-tos, and makeshift shelters. State parks, state forests, and state game lands are ideal hide-aways for "meth" labs and the waste produced from manufacturing methamphetamine.

WHAT IS THE HAZARD?

The chemicals used to produce methamphetamine are extremely hazardous. Some are highly volatile and may ignite or explode if mixed or stored improperly.

Exposure to the toxic chemicals used to produce the drug poses a variety of health risks, including shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, dizziness, lack of coordination, burns to the skin, eyes, mouth and nose, and even death.

Labs that use anhydrous ammonia in their production are extremely toxic. Anhydrous ammonia is a common agricultural fertilizer. "Meth" producers typically store the anhydrous ammonia in propane cylinders. Because propane cylinders are not designed to store anhydrous ammonia, they can explode as the ammonia eats through the walls of the cylinders. The valves, which take on a bluish-green color, frequently deteriorate and can cause hazardous leaks.

Anhydrous ammonia seeks water from the nearest source, including the human body. Because of their high moisture content, eyes, lungs, and skin are at the greatest risk of attracting the ammonia. When large amounts of anhydrous ammonia are inhaled, the throat swells and the victim suffocates. Exposure to vapors or liquids can cause severe burns, blindness or even death.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A METH LAB

- Do not touch, move or open any kind of tank or sealed container, including soda bottles and coolers. Be aware that propane tanks are often weakened and brittle due to the anhydrous ammonia and are sensitive to any kind of movement or impact.
- Do not touch or move anything that has been part of a suspected methamphetamine lab.
- Be aware of the risk of inhalation of any gases. A strong smell of ammonia or ether is an indication of a methamphetamine lab.
- Never approach a dumper.
- Notify the local or state police if anything suspicious is found during a cleanup.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Most of the items used in the production of methamphetamine are **common household products** obtained from a pharmacy or local hardware store. Large quantities of these products or a combination of several products warrant suspicion. If you discover propane tanks, tubing, duct-taped bottles or coolers, coffee filters stained with a reddish tint, or a strong smell of ammonia or ether, stay away from the area and call the local or state police.

PRODUCTS:

- Acetone (nail polish remover)
- Alcohol (isopropyl or rubbing)
- Anhydrous ammonia (fertilizer)
- Ephedrine/ Pseudoephedrine (cold medication—look for empty blister packs)
- Ether (engine starter)
- Hydrochloric acid
- Iodine
- Kitty litter
- Lithium (batteries)
- Lye
- Matches (striker plates—red phosphorous)
- Methanol (gasoline additives)
- MSM (nutritional supplement)
- Salt (table or rock)

- Sulfuric acid (drain cleaner)
- Toluene (brake cleaner)
- Trichloroethane (gun cleaner)

EQUIPMENT:

- Propane tanks
- Aluminum foil
- Clamps
- Coffee filters (stained with red phosphorus)
- Funnels
- Gas cans, coolers, jugs, bottles, jars
- Measuring cups
- Plastic storage containers
- Propane Cylinders
- Rubber tubing and duct tape



“ONE POT” OR “SHAKE & BAKE” METHOD POSES NEW DANGER TO VOLUNTEERS

Methamphetamine cooks are using the “one-pot” or “shake and bake” method by combining the ingredients into one container, usually a two-liter soda bottle. The use of this method is increasing because it is fast, portable, and eliminates the strong ammonia odor associated with traditional labs.

Reports indicate an increasing number of meth labs traveling our roadways in cars, trucks, and vans. The moving vehicles allow the release of fumes and when the process is complete, the container filled with toxic byproducts is thrown out the window.

Aside from the environmental impact, the growing use of the one-pot method increases the hazard to volunteers removing trash from littered roadways because this process is extremely volatile and any movement could cause the container to explode. The remnants of the chemicals that remain in the container are generally muddy brown or milky in color and are potentially fatal. If you come across a discarded container that appears to have been used in one-pot meth making, do not touch or sniff it – keep others away and contact the local or state police immediately.

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Sources: PA State Police Narcotics Division; Pittsburgh Poison Center; Missouri State Highway Patrol, Public Information and Education Division, Partnership for a Drug Free America, Minnesota Fire Service.