

METHAMPHETAMINE AND METHAMPHETAMINE LABORATORIES

Methamphetamine is a very powerful man-made drug that dramatically affects the central nervous system. Some of the street names used for methamphetamine include "meth", "speed", "crank", "crystal" and "ice". Usually the makeshift laboratories where this illegal drug is made are set up in rented property such as houses, apartments or hotel/motel rooms. When the laboratory is shut down, the property is generally contaminated with hazardous chemicals. The only persons entering a place where methamphetamine has been manufactured should be wearing appropriate personal protection equipment.

During the process of the manufacture of methamphetamine (referred to as a "cook"), poisonous gases are emitted into the area. The mixture of chemical can also be very explosive and highly unstable during the manufacturing process. Many "cooks" are very seriously or mortally wounded when an explosion occurs. Without proper breathing apparatus during manufacture, inhaling the fumes from the "cook" can be fatal, sometimes within minutes after inhalation. There is also the dangerous nature of those persons doing the manufacture to be considered. These are usually very dangerous persons who are very serious about their drug and the money they expect to make on the finished product. They often times are not willing to peacefully give that up if they are caught.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF METHAMPHETAMINE ON THE PEOPLE WHO USE IT?

The user of methamphetamine gets a "rush" or intense feeling of pleasure after they have taken the drug. The feeling is similar to that of cocaine. Because the effects of using methamphetamine last longer than cocaine and it is relatively easy (although dangerous) to make with all the materials needed readily available over-the-counter in the U.S., it is sometimes referred to as the "poor mans cocaine". Methamphetamine is popular also because it can be ingested in a variety of ways: injection, "snorted" (nasal ingestion), by mouth (in food, drink, etc.) or by smoking. However, long-term use can lead to addiction.

Users of methamphetamine experience periods of high energy, rapid speech and breathing, along with increased body temperature and increased blood pressure. Chronic users can also experience severe depression, paranoia, insomnia, loss of appetite, delusions and tremors. If a person continually uses methamphetamine or takes large doses they can also experience delusions, hallucinations and become violent in their behavior.

WHAT KINDS OF MATERIALS ARE USED TO MANUFACTURE METHAMPHETAMINE?

Methamphetamine users are constantly coming up with shorter and shorter methods to manufacture methamphetamine. There are many different chemical processes that can be used. Most of the current processes include volatile organic compounds, explosives, acids, bases, metals and chemical salts. There are usually many steps involved in the manufacture of methamphetamine, and other harmful (sometimes fatal) chemicals can be formed during the process.

All these chemicals, literally hundreds of different ones, can contribute to the contamination of a property. Materials in a building such as carpeting, wall board, ceiling tile, wood and fabric

can absorb chemicals during a methamphetamine “cook”. If the gases and chemicals emitted during a “cook” enter the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system, other areas of a building can be contaminated. If chemicals and hazardous waste from a “cook” are disposed of in a septic system or dumped outside, soil or groundwater may become contaminated.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL HEALTH EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO CHEMICALS FROM METHAMPHETAMINE LABS?

The potential health effect depend on several factors which include specific chemicals and how much of each chemical to which a person is exposed, how long the person is exposed and the person’s health condition at the time of exposure. Exposure to the chemicals and methamphetamine residues can cause symptoms similar to those experienced by methamphetamine users.

The symptoms from exposure can cause symptoms such as nose and throat irritation, headaches, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, confusion and breathing difficulties. A volatile organic compound which is sometimes uses and known as Benzene is known to cause cancer.

Acids or bases will cause a burning sensation on the skin and in mucous membranes and can cause severe eye damage. Metals and salts can cause a wide range of effects including respiratory irritation, decreased mental function, anemia, kidney damage and birth defects. Lead and mercury are particularly hazardous.

WHO IS THE RESPONSIBLE PARTY FOR CLEAN-UP OF PROPERTY?

The ultimate responsibility for the property clean-up is the owner of the property. They may also be held legally responsible if persons get sick after they re-enter a contaminated building or property.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED SAFE CLEAN-UP LEVELS?

There aren’t any levels established in association with methamphetamine labs. Usually, the potential for exposure is done on a case-by-case basis. A risk assessment may be necessary to make the evaluation. One of the “worst case” exposure scenario would be an infant or toddler in only a diaper, being exposed to chemicals by breathing, touching and hand-to-mouth activity.

The current problem is that methamphetamine manufacture is so clandestine, that for every one lab dismantled, there are probably “cook” sites that are never found. For example, the “cook” stops for the night in a motel, uses the room to “cook”, and is gone with the finished product by morning. The next people using the room, maybe with children, never suspect that they are being exposed to the contamination left behind from a methamphetamine “cook”.

HOW CAN I TELL IF A FRIEND OR MY CHILD IS USING METHAMPHETAMINE?

Sometimes it is not easy to tell; however, there are signs and symptoms that can include:

Inability to sleep
Increased sensitivity to noise
Nervous physical activity, like scratching
Irritability, dizziness, or confusion
Extreme anorexia
Tremors or even convulsions
Increased heart rate and/or blood pressure
Presence of inhaling paraphernalia such as razor blades, mirrors, and short straws
Presence of injecting paraphernalia such as syringes, heated spoons, or surgical tubing

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Methamphetamine and methamphetamine laboratories are not just a problem in our state, it is a nationwide problem that multiplies every day.

Help us protect our county. The problem of drugs cannot be solved by law enforcement alone. It takes the active participation of all segments of our county. **YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!** If you suspect there is a problem near you involving methamphetamine or any other type of drugs, call the Tuolumne Narcotic Team (TNT) office and make a report. You can do this anonymously if you choose. TNT agents will follow up on every call.

If you have a business, organization or school and would like to have a presentation on the recognition and dangers of drugs, call TNT and make arrangements for a presentation. TNT is never too busy to help advance public awareness and education.

The mission of the Tuolumne Narcotic Team is to significantly diminish the availability and use of illegal drugs within the boundaries of Tuolumne County and apprehend the responsible offenders, thereby increasing public safety. Our mission can become reality with your continued support.