

Neighbourhood Support New Zealand



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Neighbourhood Support Fact Sheet

Methamphetamine Clandestine Laboratory Awareness

Introduction

The illegal manufacture and distribution of methamphetamine (meth) - often called "P" - is big business in New Zealand. Gangs are prominent but other people are also involved, motivated by the quick manufacturing process and high financial returns.

A kilogram of over-the-counter pseudoephedrine based cold and flu tablet medication and a number of relatively inexpensive chemicals, including common household products, can yield the manufacturer a profit of around \$200,000 in just a few days. However the manufacturing process is extremely dangerous and so are many of the people involved.

A dangerous process

Meth is manufactured in illicit laboratories in private homes, motel units, sheds, caravans, and in car boots. In 2002, 147 clandestine drug laboratories were located. This compares with 47 in 2001 and 9 in 2000. Current global trends suggest the use and manufacture of methamphetamine will continue to rise.

Most of the people who make meth - or "cooks" as they are known - have extensive criminal histories. They often keep loaded firearms handy during the cooking process and, after prolonged exposure to the drug and chemicals, may not be rational to deal with.

As well as the danger posed by the people involved in the meth business there are inherent risks in the manufacturing process due to the toxicity and combustibility of the chemicals.

Some of the chemicals and processes involved in producing methamphetamine can become explosive and / or give off toxic fumes that attack skin, eyes, and the mucous membranes of the respiratory tract and can cause death.

These highly toxic chemicals and their fumes pose a significant safety risk for Police, Environmental Science and Research and other emergency personnel involved in the investigation and clean-up process.

The people involved in the manufacture of methamphetamine don't generally observe safe chemical handling and disposal practises, and usually have only a very basic knowledge of the chemical process they are completing.

Environmental pollution

The manufacture of methamphetamine results in environmental pollution. Every kilogram of manufactured meth produces 7-10 kilograms of toxic by-product, which is either flushed down toilets or dumped - quite often in residential neighbourhoods where it poses a significant risk to health, often necessitating evacuation and a clean up operation. The fumes from chemicals produced such as phosphine are highly explosive as well as deadly if inhaled.

Building contamination can also occur with many of the stains from the chemical process containing carcinogens (cancer-causing substances) that can affect later occupiers.

Police and legislative response

Police strategies to help combat the increase in the manufacture of methamphetamine have been assisted by recent legislative changes.

The Government has reclassified methamphetamine as a Class A drug with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment for dealing. Police have also been provided with wider enforcement powers, including the ability to search premises and people without a warrant if they have reasonable grounds to believe an offence has been committed under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975. The Misuse of Drugs Act 1995 can be located under Statutes in [New Zealand legislation](#).

Police have also formulated a code of practice with pharmaceutical suppliers, established dedicated clandestine laboratory investigation teams and a safety training video and package for frontline police officers.

How to spot a clandestine meth laboratory

Police appeal to members of the public to come forward with any information they may have about people involved in the manufacture or supply of methamphetamine.

It is possible that you might observe some activity or see signs that indicate drug dealing or methamphetamine manufacturing could be occurring. If you find a drug lab, keep your distance from it and call the Police immediately on 111. Keep calm, give your name, address and telephone number. Report where and what is happening. Stay on the phone and, if you can safely, keep watching and write down a description of the people involved and their vehicles. If you have suspicions but aren't entirely sure, still call the Police as soon as possible. See the fact sheet on [giving a good description](#)

Dangerous chemicals and common products used in the manufacture of methamphetamine include:

Lithium, Red Phosphorus, Salt, Methanol, Sulphuric Acid, Ephedrine / Pseudoephedrine, Alcohol, Veterinarian Products, Alkaline Batteries, Matches, Rock Salt, Car Fuel System Cleaners, Drain and Grease Cleaners, Sudafed, Paint Thinners and Allergy Products

The following is a list of common occurrences or telltale signs of methamphetamine manufacturing. Alone, any of these activities or signs may not mean that drug dealing or methamphetamine manufacturing is occurring. However, some or several of them happening together may indicate a problem:

- Frequent visitors at all times of the day or night
- Frequent late night activity
- Windows blackened out or curtains always drawn
- Visitors with expensive vehicles
- Unfriendly people, appearing secretive about their activities
- People watching cars suspiciously when they pass by
- Appearing to be paranoid by exhibiting odd behaviour such as an extensive investment in home security
- Strange odours coming from house or rubbish
- Rubbish has numerous bottles and containers, especially chemical containers
- Putting rubbish out in another neighbours collection area

Latest news on the P epidemic

The [New Zealand Herald](#) has an Internet column dedicated to news items on methamphetamine or "P" as it is often referred to.

Information about Methamphetamine

The Foundation for Alcohol and Drug Education (FADE) has produced a brochure on Methamphetamine called "Breaking the Ice" that can be ordered from their [website](#). You can phone FADE for further information on 09 498-1719.