

# The NEBLINE<sup>®</sup>

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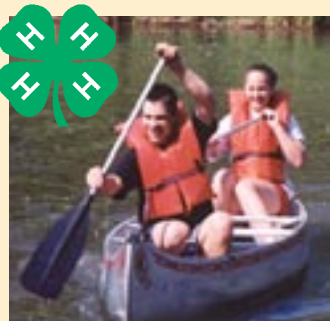
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## Meth Production is Toxic to Communities

Lorene Bartos  
*Extension Educator*

Do you know where your children are? Do you know what your neighbors are doing or what is going on in your community? These might seem like easy to answer questions or not a problem. Are you aware there may be a "hidden danger" — methamphetamine — in your community? Meth is an extremely addictive, illegal drug commonly referred to as meth, crank, crystal, speed, chalk, glass, ice or zip.

Most methamphetamine is produced in clandestine or hidden laboratories. Labs can be located in homes, apartments, hotel and motel rooms, garages, vehicles, storage sheds, barns, vacant buildings, outdoors and in ditches. Remote locations are often chosen to conceal the smell of chemicals.

### Meth Ingredients

Meth can be easily produced or cooked using ordinary — though toxic — household chemicals in combination with ephedrine or pseudoephedrine found in common asthma and cold remedies sold over the counter. These ingredients and the needed equipment can be easily purchased from drug stores, supermarkets, hardware stores, feed stores and farm supply outlets.

Most meth ingredients are toxic and volatile:

- drain cleaner/rubbing alcohol
- lithium batteries
- anhydrous ammonia
- red phosphorous
- starter fluid or de-icer
- muriatic or hydrochloric acid
- lye
- iodine

People who work in retail stores should be alert to large purchases of these items.

Lancaster County farmer cooperatives have taken many precautions to secure anhydrous ammonia tanks. Most storage areas have added lighting, fencing and gates are locked in the evening. Locks have been put on valves. Propane tanks (often used in meth production) are also secured in locked storage areas.

### Dangers of Meth Production

Production of meth in a home "laboratory" poses dangers to the producers and the community. Breathing the toxic fumes can cause irreparable harm to nasal passages, lungs and brain.

The ingredients can ignite, corrode or react. Producers of homemade meth are typically

users themselves and not skilled in chemistry. Cooks may be producing meth while their mental capacities are impaired by the drug. All these factors make meth labs a catastrophe waiting to happen. There have been several explosions and fires across Nebraska as a result of cooking meth.

Five to seven pounds of toxic waste are produced per pound of meth. These hazardous chemicals may be dumped on the ground or in nearby streams and lakes, buried or simply left behind. Toxic wastes can contaminate drinking water.

Buildings used to make meth can be a health risk to the next unsuspecting tenants. Toxic vapors may have absorbed into the furniture, flooring, air vents and walls. Harsh liquids dumped or spilled can remain for a long time as residue in bathtubs, toilets, sinks or floors.

### High Cost of Cleanup

Meth lab clean up is very expensive. The average cost to clean up one lab can exceed \$4,000. Last year, the Nebraska State Patrol dismantled more than 300 labs.

### Warning Signs of Meth Activity

#### Signs of a meth lab are:

- Chemicals
- Basic chemistry paraphernalia such as laboratory glassware, rubber tubing, clear glass jugs.
- Heat plates, camp stoves or other heat sources.
- Cookware containing powdery substances.
- Strong odor of urine or unusual chemical odors such as ether, ammonia or acetone.

#### Signs of meth lab waste:

- Cold/allergy medicine packaging.
- Empty containers from: Heet, antifreeze, ether, starting fluids, freon, lye, drain cleaners, paint thinner or acetone.
- Coffee filters with white pasty, powdery or red substance.
- Coolers or thermos bottles.
- Propane tanks.

#### Signs of a drug house:

- Little or no traffic during the day, but lots of traffic at late hours.
- Extra efforts to cover windows or reinforce doors.
- Never putting out trash.
- Unfriendly, paranoid or secretive behavior.
- Renters who pay landlords in cash. Unemployed persons who seem to have plenty of cash.

### What To Do

What can you do to help in the fight against meth production? Be informed, be aware



Photo reprinted from "Clandestine Methamphetamine Laboratories"



Photo courtesy of Nebraska State Patrol



Photo courtesy of Nebraska State Patrol

Meth labs and lab waste are hazardous to human health and the environment. Clandestine labs can be located nearly anywhere.

and be alert.

#### If you suspect a meth lab:

- Call your local law enforcement or State Patrol.
- Do not attempt to stop the chemical reaction. Do not shut off water supply to the house or the chemical reaction.
- Do not turn any electrical devices/lights on or off.

#### If you find any potential meth lab litter:

- Move away from the area.
- Call 911 or \*55 on your cell phone or your nearest law enforcement office.
- Do not touch or smell any potential meth litter items!

#### If you suspect a drug house:

- Hold a neighborhood meeting to talk about the problem. **Do not** invite suspects. **Do** invite law enforcement.
- Many drug houses are rentals.

Send the homeowner a letter saying you will not put up with this activity.

- Record and report suspicious behavior. The Nebraska State Patrol has a log sheet available. Many drug houses have been shut down through citizen input.

#### Sources:

- "Life or Meth What's It Cost?" Midwest HIDTA
- UNL Cooperative Extension HE Form 543 "Methamphetamine — One of Rural Nebraska's Greatest Challenges"
- "Meth Lab Litter and Safety Rules," Keep Nebraska Beautiful
- "Do You Suspect Illegal Drug Activity in Your Neighborhood?" Nebraska State Patrol

**Meth use has a devastating effect on individuals' lives, families and communities. See July NEBLINE for article.**