

# "Operation **Don't Meth Around**"

Submission for

**The Herman Goldstein Award**

Submitted by

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# BROKEN ARROW POLICE DEPARTMENT

## OPERATION "DON'T METH AROUND": PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF MANUFACTURING METHAMPHETAMINE.

### SUMMARY

**The Problem:** Methamphetamine is an epidemic in the State of Oklahoma. The U. S. Department of Justice statistics indicate that Oklahoma is currently second in the nation for methamphetamine lab seizures. California places first in the nation; if you break it down by per capita, Oklahoma actually places first. The Broken Arrow Police Department recognizes this growing problem within the state and our community by responding to a number of fires caused by the manufacturing process of methamphetamine. Due to the uncaring attitudes of the perpetrators for the safety of innocent people including children, members of the Broken Arrow Street Crimes Unit decided to ask the community of Broken Arrow to assist in the fight against manufacturing methamphetamine. Therefore, operation "Don't Meth Around" was started.

**Analysis:** Contact was made with the business managers and owners within the city of Broken Arrow. During these interviews, questions were asked about the ingredients used to manufacture methamphetamine. The majority of these businesses stated that they were unaware of what was actually used to manufacture the drug, and were surprised about the accessibility of the ingredients used. When they were advised of common household products used to make meth, they responded by mentioning the increase in purchases of

certain items, such as paint thinners, cold medication, matches, lithium batteries and an increase in thefts of these types of products. They also mentioned the types of personality traits of the individuals who purchased or asked about the products used in the manufacturing process of methamphetamine.

Not only did we discover that the community and businesses were unaware of the indications of a clandestine meth lab, but employees within the Police Department had very little training in regard to these labs. Most Officers would ask questions about the ingredients, hazards and how to recognize a lab if they came across one on a traffic stop or on a call.

Response: Empowered with the knowledge that education for the community and officers was needed, the Police Department responded by:

- Developing an informational brochure for the community
- Obtaining and disseminating colored posters with pictures of ingredients and items used to manufacture methamphetamine so that the products could be easily identified for the employees of the local businesses.
- Presentation of Community Seminars
- In-service training for officers and dispatchers
- Development of departmental policy and procedures on clan labs
- Working with local businesses to place hidden cameras where needed
- Providing a crime-line in which suspicious activity could be reported
- Developing an informational center of clan labs on the Police Department web site.

Assessment: Based on the community response, the Police Department's Street Crimes Unit has identified numerous suspects involved in the manufacturing process of methamphetamine, as well as an increase in arrests of drug related crimes. Since the start of operation "Don't Meth Around" in December of 2000, the amount of meth labs seized in 2001 in Broken Arrow increased 100% from the amount of labs seized in 2000.

Based on interviews of meth offenders, a response to the community has made it more difficult for perpetrators to obtain the ingredients needed to manufacture meth. Local businesses that sell pseudoephedrine have placed the products either behind the pharmacy area to sell upon request, or they have placed very limited boxes on the shelf. They have also gone as far as requesting identification of suspicious purchasers before the sale is permitted. Hidden cameras have been placed on the isles where utensils and precursors are sold, thus helping us to identify potential suspects of meth producers and dismantling clandestine methamphetamine laboratories.

## SCANNING:

Methamphetamine or "Meth" was first considered as "poor man's cocaine". It is produced in clandestine laboratories, using common household chemicals in conjunction with cold remedies sold over the counter. Fewer than 10% of those arrested for manufacturing meth are trained chemists. Meth laboratory operators or "cooks" usually are individuals who have little or no chemical training and simply learned the formula from other meth cooks or the Internet.

Many of the chemicals found in these labs are very corrosive and/or flammable. The vapors that are emitted from the chemical reactions attack mucous membranes, skin, eyes and the respiratory tract. Some chemicals will react with water or other chemicals and cause a fire or explosion.

In addition to the risk of explosive gases, chemical contamination from the hazardous waste of these labs poses a serious threat to the environment and to the health of unsuspecting citizens within the community. Each pound of meth manufactured in a clandestine lab can generate up to five or more pounds of toxic waste. Clandestine lab operators routinely dump such waste into local streams, rivers and sewage systems in order to cover up the evidence of their illegal operation.

Our Unit discovered early in the operation that there was no specific area in which the perpetrators would focus on. We investigated meth labs in neighborhoods both lower class and upper class neighborhoods, as well as in local motels, hotels, storage buildings, outbuildings, automobiles and rural areas. There was not a particular area of Broken Arrow that we had to focus on. Meth Labs were a problem throughout the city.

What became apparent to us, the Broken Arrow Police Department's Street Crimes Unit, was the amount of investigations involving fires caused by methamphetamine laboratories. Some of these fires were in rural areas within the Broken Arrow Community and others were within just feet of neighboring homes and schools. Along with the fires caused by the process of manufacturing meth, we also found a number of children present during the actual cooking process. It had become very clear to us that just waiting for the phone to ring so we could respond to calls of possible meth labs were not enough; we had to do more. As members of the Street Crimes Unit, we realized that the chemicals used to manufacture methamphetamine could be bought locally at grocery stores, hardware stores, convenience stores, vet supply stores and chemical supply stores. To attack this problem of clandestine meth labs, the best approach is to address it where the chemicals are bought (local stores), where the manufacturing process takes place (community) and to break the cycle of learning through the method of being passed down to the next generation (the children). To be successful at these attempts, we could ensure that the risk of a chemical explosion and fires would lessen. Neighborhoods would be absent of toxic waste and become a safe and healthy environment for children to live in. The decrease in the accessibility of methamphetamine could also lead to the decline of major crimes within the City of Broken Arrow. This is when operation "Don't Meth Around" began.

#### ANALYSIS:

To begin we started by addressing the businesses within the City of Broken Arrow, and question them about their knowledge of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories. We found out early that the employees had little to no knowledge about meth labs and the

type of people that manufacture meth, but they were more than willing to help us address the problem. One of the owners of a local business stated, "It's about time Broken Arrow realized that drugs are within the community, and I am willing to help prevent this problem in any way I can, just tell me how." It was at this particular time that we noticed that the businesses of Broken Arrow were not as much concerned with making a profit from selling precursors, but more concerned in helping to fight the problem of manufacturing methamphetamine.

Members of the Street Crimes Unit were contacted by John Walls, a reporter for KJRH channel 2 news. He requested an interview for a week-long series of investigative reports on the problem of methamphetamine in northeastern Oklahoma, more specifically in the Tulsa area. Mr. Walls also had a cameraman follow the Street crimes unit on a search warrant that was later aired during the six o'clock newscast. This newscast began to address the problem of methamphetamine with in our community. Mr. Walls received a prestigious award for the series.

A community meeting about clandestine meth labs revealed that the community not only is concerned about the hazardous of clan labs, but the effect it has had on the young adults. Young girls are taking the drug to loose weight and young men are selling the drug for a profit so they can afford worldly possessions. This is before they become addicted to meth. So not only are clan labs a criminal concern, but the drug it produces, methamphetamine, can destroy a young life.

When both adults and young adults, ingest the methamphetamine (i.e. smoked, snorted, orally ingested, and injected), they begin to experience a sense of increased energy and euphoria which last from six to fourteen hours. Meth abusers usually inject or

smoke high levels of the drug every two or three hours during the day. They consume the drug continuously. This often results in the abuser staying awake for several days and experience extreme irritability, sleep deprivation, increased nervousness, anxiety, paranoia, hallucinations and violent or erratic behavior. Their motivating factor for using meth is to experience the "high" but once addicted they can not control their need for the narcotic causing them to feel driven to obtain the drug even if that leads them to try to manufacture the drug themselves, in and of it's self this creates a very hazardous situations.

During the process of investigating meth labs, Street Crimes Unit began to notice that small children were present during the operation of a lab. Children who are found in these homes run the risk of toxicologic, neurologic, respiratory, dermatologic, or other adverse affects of methamphetamine lab chemical and/or stimulant exposure, and the high risk of neglect or abuse. The seizure of one lab indicated that the suspects were manufacturing on the same table where two young children was eating. In the future we hope to implement a set of procedures that calls for :

- Insuring the immediate safety and security of children found when law enforcement seizes in-home methamphetamine laboratories, by addressing their needs for immediate medical assessment and treatment, placement in crisis intervention support;
- Enhancing charges against offending parents and guardians with child endangerment charges;
- Incarcerating offending parents when necessary, and placing children in stable families;

- Getting treatment for offending parents and guardians who seek reunification with their children in a stable home environment;
- Breaking the generational cycle of drug use by intervening on behalf of children in drug-affected families;
- Increasing community awareness of the danger associated with meth production to decrease community tolerance exposures to such dangers;

RESPONSE:

After addressing the business and the employee, Street Crimes began to address the problems and concerns of the community. Education would have to be an issue that defiantly has to be considered. But, how do you educate the general public about meth labs without telling someone how to manufacture methamphetamine? Response of one of our Officers was "you can list all the ingredients to make a Dr. Pepper, but unless you know what to do with the ingredients (have a recipe) it would be difficult to make a Dr. Pepper.

Realizing that education would be our primary focus, Officers of the Broken Arrow Police Department began handing out posters with color pictures of items used to manufacture methamphetamine, to make the items more recognizable. Along with these posters an informational brochure was developed that would inform the community not only about meth labs but the effects of the drug itself, methamphetamine. These posters and brochures were distributed throughout the city and we were able to disseminate a crime line number in which suspicious purchases or persons could be reported anonymously.

The businesses were not our only focus at this point. Knowing that the public would address questions to the Police Department, it was apparent that educating the Officers would be a must. Commonly among Oklahoma Law Enforcement, little to no training was offered about meth labs. An officer would have to be a narcotics officer before formal training of meth labs was available. Therefore, the Broken Arrow Police Department offered in-service training on clandestine meth labs to all officers with the Police Department. This became a valuable piece of training; Officers and Detectives began to notice signs of a clandestine lab. More particularly, bluing of a metal valve on a propane tank is a sign of anhydrous ammonia. But the Police Department didn't stop at the Officers; they continued to educate the dispatchers as well. An informational booklet was created to give dispatchers a better knowledge of what a caller may be talking about when reporting a possible meth lab. For example, a call came in to the Police Department about a substantial amount of pseudoephedrine pills being purchased at a local business. The dispatcher was able to recognize that the call was in reference to ingredients being purchased for a possible meth lab. The dispatcher began to ask the caller questions about the individuals who purchased the items and was able to get valuable information about the suspects and the vehicle they were driving, leading Officers responding to the area, to the right suspects where arrests were made for endeavoring to manufacture methamphetamine.

Once contact was made with the local businesses of Broken Arrow, we began to address the public with the same type of method used with the businesses, by education and providing a crime-line in which to report suspicious activity. We began to hand out informational brochures and scheduling community presentations. Currently we've

conduct a few meetings and in the process of scheduling several more for local civic groups, church organizations and local schools.

Officers within the Street Crimes Unit have continued their education by attending training courses that address these issues. One in particular was Drug Endangered Children seminar. From this training, Street Crimes Unit can use a multidisciplinary approach, comprised of individuals from local Police Departments, Medical Facilities, Child Welfare and District Attorney Office to address the problem of children living in homes with methamphetamine labs. A grant was awarded to Tulsa County for this type of approach. The city of Broken Arrow falls under two counties, Tulsa County and Wagoner County and currently, Wagoner has not yet established this type of approach but it is our intention to help get this program up and going for the children of Wagoner County.

#### ASSESSMENT:

Once the program was implemented, we began to see immediate results. Just a few weeks after disseminating information on meth labs, the Police Department received a call from one of the local businesses. The caller stated that two men came in to the store and purchased items used to make meth and he had recognized them from being in the store previously purchasing the same products. Officers responded and as a result of their investigation one of the largest meth labs in Broken Arrow was dismantled and several arrests were made. Not to mentioned that Street Crimes had been investigating these same suspects for about four months prior to this event. To sum it, up that phone call from the local business helped us tremendously with our investigation and gave us a foot in the door.

Shortly thereafter other calls began to come in on the hotline. Street Crimes began the task of developing investigations in relation to the calls. Suspects were identified, suspect vehicles were discovered, locations of possible lab sites, and the identification of what type of labs were operational. For example, the sell of numerous matchbooks indicated that a red phosphorous was the primary type of "cook" or if a large amount of lithium batteries were purchase, then a "nazi cook" with the presence of anhydrous ammonia would be the primary type of manufacturing. This could be very important to the investigating officers. Knowing what chemicals to expect is always a safety issue among officers, such as lithium metal which reacts violently to water. What if a fire broke out during a raid? You wouldn't want to extinguish the fire with water. The information gathered from businesses not only gives us valuable information about suspects but safety aspects we would have never otherwise have known. This allows officers that are investigating a meth lab case to prepare. Having this thought in mind suspect information also gives officers a upper hand on safety issues as well. Identifying a possible suspect we can determine through records check whether or not a suspect has a violent history or a violent offender from previous arrest. It helps the officers to gain knowledge of what might happen when the time comes to make contact with that suspect.

Operation "Don't Meth Around" was implemented in December of 2000. In 2001 the number of meth labs seized in Broken Arrow increased 100% from the number of labs seized in 2000. 50% of these labs are attributed to our problem-solving project, "Don't Meth Around". The amount of narcotics arrests increases by 25% and the amount of search warrants served also increased by 56%; these numbers are also attributed to the "Don't Meth Around" project. Due to these efforts, several ounces of methamphetamine

have been seized and the distribution of this narcotic has been prevented from hitting the street. In the future with the further implementation of the "Don't Meth Around" program, the Broken Arrow Police Department expects to see a continued decrease in the seizures of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories and an increase to the community's safety and health by ensuring that contaminated residences used as meth labs are dismantled and the purchase of precursor chemicals are increasingly more difficult to obtain.

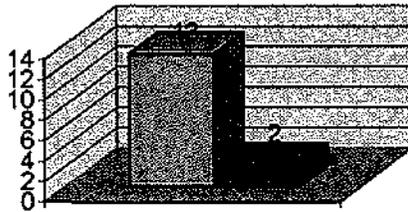
Due to the abundance of community responses, the Street Crimes Unit is finding it difficult to keep up with the task of investigating every tip. We have attempted to defeat this task by developing a computer database that will allow us to keep track of suspects and their transactions.

#### **AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION**

Operation Don't Meth Around was a problem-solving project implemented by a narcotics officer within the Street Crimes Unit with the support given by a Sergeant, Captain, and Chief of Police. Additional personnel associated with the project are citizens specializing in the fields of crime analysis, and crime prevention. Economic support of this project was funded by the District Attorney's drug fund obtained by forfeitures and seizures from narcotic violators.

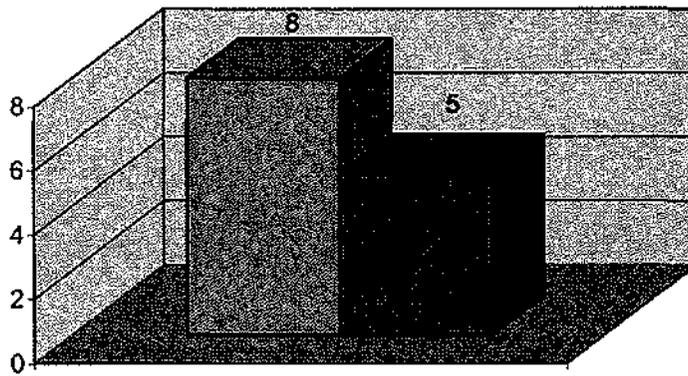
Contact person for operation "Don't Meth Around":

Detective Gayla Adcock  
2302 S. 1<sup>st</sup> Place  
Broken Arrow, Ok. 74012  
(918)259-8400  
(918)451-8242 Fax  
[gadcock@city.broken-arrow.ok.us](mailto:gadcock@city.broken-arrow.ok.us)



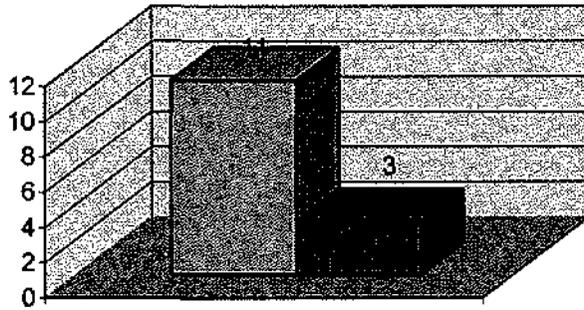
Would your store be interested in sending employees to a one to two hour training seminar on fraudulent prescription detection and Methamphetamine production? The seminar would be held locally and at no cost.

Yes  No



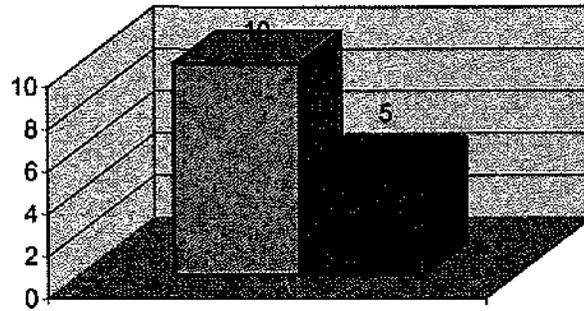
Is the pharmacy taking any action to prevent the sale of Clandestine Lab Products

Yes  No



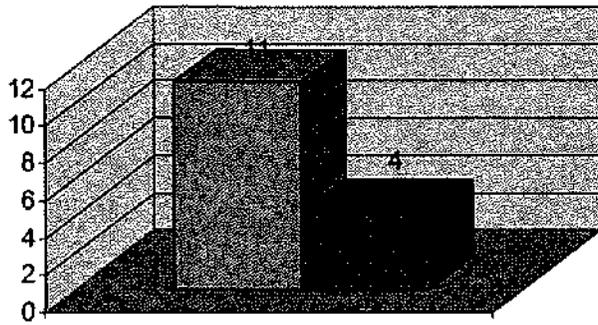
Has your store seen an increase in the theft of products containing pseudoephedrine or other ingredients used to manufacture illegal drugs

Yes  No



Has your store seen an increase in sales of products containing pseudoephedrine or other ingredients used to manufacture illegal drugs

Yes  No



Has your store taken any measures to counter the theft of products containing pseudoephedrine or other ingredients used to manufacture illegal drugs

Yes  No