



# **COPS** *INNOVATIONS*

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

*A Closer Look*

## **Combating Methamphetamine Laboratories and Abuse: Strategies for Success**



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***"It is critical that agencies tailor responses to local circumstances and that each response be justified based on reliable problem analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in solving the problem."***

***Michael S. Scott  
Author of Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Series:  
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## The Methamphetamine Problem

Methamphetamine is a highly addictive central nervous system stimulant. It can be injected, snorted, smoked, or ingested orally. Commonly used street names for methamphetamine include (meth, crank, crystal meth, speed, and ice). Methamphetamine can be relatively easily manufactured through storebought materials, and according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, is the most prevalent synthetic drug produced in the United States.

Methamphetamine is frequently produced in clandestine laboratories. These labs can result in serious physical injury from explosions, fires, chemical burns, and toxic fumes, produce environmental hazards, pose clean-up problems, and endanger the lives and health of children. There are generally two types of clandestine drug labs, "super labs" and "mom and pop labs." According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, "super" labs are highly organized labs and account for approximately 80% of all methamphetamine produced. "Mom and pop" labs are more common and typically manufacture a much smaller amount of methamphetamine often only producing enough drugs for their own and close associates' use. Although these labs account for a much smaller portion of all methamphetamine produced, they account for far more explosions, fires, hazardous waste dumping, and child endangerment.

During the year 2000, approximately 8.8 million people in the U.S. reported trying methamphetamine at least once in their lifetime and over a quarter of high school seniors indicated that it was "fairly easy" or "very easy" to obtain "crystal meth."<sup>1</sup> The effects of methamphetamine intake include decreased appetite, increased activity and sense of well being. The negative effects of methamphetamine use can include physical addiction, psychotic behavioral episodes, and brain damage. Chronic methamphetamine use can cause anxiety, confusion, insomnia, paranoia, and delusions. According to a report by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the damage caused to the brain by methamphetamine can be similar to that caused by Alzheimer's disease, stroke, and epilepsy.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Summary Findings from the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, September 2001. [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

<sup>2</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse, Methamphetamine Linked to Long-Term Damage to Brain Cells, March 2000. [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)



Methamphetamine abuse is a serious problem across the nation, but has been particularly prevalent in the West and Midwest. Police officials, public health officers, policymakers, state legislatures, the U.S. Congress, and the media have all warned that methamphetamine is dangerous to those who manufacture, possess, and use it.

Methamphetamine is also a serious health hazard to anyone who comes into reasonable contact with the chemicals used to produce it; notably, these include children, residents who live near meth labs and first responders to the scene of a clandestine laboratory-emergency medical teams, fire fighters, and police officers.

Local police are faced with the challenge of disrupting a drug market where much of the buying, selling, and cooking happens in private residences or rural locations, and among people who are often familiar with one another. In addition, due to the various chemicals used in the cooking process and the inexperience of many cooks, there is also a high potential for fires, explosions, or chemical spills. First responders are faced with an extraordinarily dangerous situation, especially if they are unaware of the presence of a methamphetamine laboratory at the scene.

### **COPS Funding to Combat Methamphetamine**

From 1998-2002, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) has provided approximately \$137 million in funding to more than 100 state and local law enforcement agencies to combat the production, distribution, and use of methamphetamine. COPS methamphetamine grants encourage law enforcement agencies to use advanced technologies and creative problem-solving strategies to implement resourceful solutions to persistent crime and disorder problems. Consistent with community policing approaches to methamphetamine reduction, law enforcement agencies were encouraged to develop partnerships with other local government agencies and community groups to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of programs. Agencies were also encouraged to craft innovative strategies (to move beyond mere enforcement) and to track and evaluate implementation efforts. COPS has also provided \$64 million to the DEA for lab clean up efforts and training. Training funds allow state and local law enforcement officers to become OSHA qualified in lab identification, enforcement, and dismantling strategies. Additionally, COPS has provided a series of regional training conferences that allow grantees to share information with one another and learn about methamphetamine problems and solutions from experts in the field.



## The COPS Methamphetamine National Evaluation

In 1998, the first year of the program, the COPS Office provided approximately \$750,000 each to six carefully selected agencies. Through a competitive process, the Institute for Law and Justice (ILJ) ([www.ilj.org](http://www.ilj.org)) in partnership with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Solutions, Inc. received a grant to conduct an evaluation of this initial program. The evaluation focused on the history of the methamphetamine problem in these sites and developed a detailed process evaluation of their implementation. Researchers conducted interviews, collected data from police, observed clandestine lab seizures and other interventions, surveyed partners about their roles and responsibilities, examined newspaper articles, and made use of existing national databases to augment their findings. This document provides a brief summary of the findings of this National Evaluation and, based on other COPS-funded research, provides suggestions for how agencies can better deal with their own methamphetamine problems. Readers are encouraged to review the entire evaluation report that can be found on the COPS Web site ([www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)).

## Overall Findings and Recommendations

In part, the National Evaluation found that:

- Educating police officials about methamphetamine, precursor chemicals, and clandestine labs led to increased lab identification and helped prevent on-scene injuries to officers. This is essential given the serious health and safety problems that methamphetamine laboratories can create and the difficulty in identifying possible lab locations.
- Training public works and hotel/motel staff proved successful. Given that they are frequently the first individuals to come across a lab or a contaminated space, educating these workers about how to identify methamphetamine, precursor chemicals, and lab equipment can prevent injury and promote quick reporting of illegal activity.



- Community education via public awareness campaigns provided invaluable information on methamphetamine-related issues and increased awareness about the prevalence of the problem. Community members were better able to identify methamphetamine-related activity and were more likely to contact police about suspicious activity in their neighborhoods.
- Drug courts could be a beneficial option for offenders, primarily because it immediately exposes methamphetamine-addicted individuals to treatment and provides a rigid structure with little tolerance for infractions. This is particularly important because methamphetamine users are often multi-drug users and because of the highly addictive nature of the drug.
- One of the major successes of the Methamphetamine Initiative was the partnerships that were formed as a result of the program. Given that methamphetamine presents a number of serious problems in a community (e.g. dirty houses, environmental hazards, chemical contamination, endangered children), partnerships among police departments and other local agencies as well as with community members are essential to successfully reduce the problem.



**Partnerships can be developed with:**



Emergency Response Agencies (Fire and Medical)



Neighboring Law Enforcement Agencies



City Prosecutors/District Attorney's  
(increase penalties and prosecution)



Parks Departments



Departments of Public Safety



Environmental Protection Agencies



Agencies or Businesses Involved in Hazardous  
Chemical Clean-up



Local Health Departments



(enforce nuisance laws and conduct clean-up efforts)



Child Welfare Agencies



Youth and Family Service Agencies  
(to assist endangered children and families)



Neighborhood Watch Groups



Hotel/Motel Staff/Gas Service Employees  
(to assist in lab identification)



Local Retailers of Precursor Chemicals



Drug Courts



Treatment Centers



Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)



U.S. Attorney's Offices



Partnering with such agencies provides a vast array of previously untapped resources. It can assist in getting more methamphetamine-involved individuals into treatment, being better prepared to handle children exposed to methamphetamine, providing appropriate resources to help families recover from the effects of methamphetamine abuse, and coordinating with other law enforcement entities to share intelligence about methamphetamine-related activity. I

A brief description of each of the six agencies included in the National Evaluation is provided below.

**Phoenix Police Department, Arizona** used a non-traditional media campaign and increased enforcement and officer training as part of their overall methamphetamine reduction efforts. The media campaign involved educating the public about the dangers and consequences of methamphetamine use and production and how to identify possible methamphetamine activity. The campaign used a video, presentations to community groups (including hotel/motel workers), billboards, postcards, and announcements on grocery store bags. Officer training involved the identification of possible methamphetamine activity. There was an increase in reported methamphetamine activity by both officers and citizens, many of the additional reports were directly attributed to this increased training. There was also an upsurge in methamphetamine investigations at hotels and motels as training efforts at these locations appeared to be effective.

“*Public attitudes about drug abuse need to be addressed. Too many people believe abuse is only the users' problem as well as their prerogative. The media could take greater responsibility to educate the community, but generally report only sensational events, e.g., labs blowing up. Similarly, the educational efforts should be reality-based, focusing on the health hazards of meth production and effects of long term use on the brain.*”

Anonymous Respondent, Phoenix  
ILJ Methamphetamine Evaluation 2002.





**Oklahoma City Police Department, Oklahoma** focused on increased enforcement, training, a public education campaign and a partnership with a drug court to deal with methamphetamine problems. Officers used undercover buys, knock and talks, confidential informants, surveillance, and assistance from patrol officers making traffic stops to apprehend methamphetamine users and distributors. A 70% increase in methamphetamine labs seized occurred in the first year of the grant program. City-wide citizen training in methamphetamine abuse and identification was also conducted. Part of this training was focused on hotel/motel associations and natural gas employees. Gas company employees respond annually to over 600,000 service calls in Oklahoma City and service technicians perform a variety of inspections both inside and outside residences and businesses. Thus, they have wide-spread and frequent access to properties and may be particularly effective at identifying possible lab locations.

**Dallas Police Department, Texas** engaged in public education campaigns, drug court treatment programs aimed at reducing recidivism, training on the identification of precursor chemical suppliers for citizens and officers, and enforcement. Specific criteria were developed for admission to and for participation in the drug court program. The fact that these criteria were strictly enforced helped to increase the program's success rate. During the grant period, the department increased the number of clandestine lab seizures and arrests for methamphetamine. Identification of precursor chemical suppliers was hampered by the state's lack of laws restricting the purchase of these chemicals in large quantities.

*“Before, I would have walked through an apartment and had no clue what all that glassware meant. It would have just been harmless junk. Now I realize that it is a potential health and public safety hazard.”*

Dallas Police Department Officer, Dallas  
ILJ Methamphetamine Evaluation 2002.



**Little Rock Police Department, Arkansas** focused on increased enforcement and training of all sworn officers regarding methamphetamine identification and response. These training efforts have also been extended to the public. The initiative has established a telephone hotline which citizens are encouraged to call if they suspect methamphetamine activity is taking place. An information campaign was also developed for retailers of precursor chemicals. The lack of laws restricting access to precursor chemicals limited the ability of police to reduce large purchases of these items. However, reports from retailers increased dramatically providing the police with invaluable information including the license plate numbers of large quantity purchasers. The majority of lab seizures over the course of the program were the direct result of citizen or informant information. This exemplifies the closed nature of the methamphetamine market and why citizen/retailer training in methamphetamine identification is crucial for success. In addition, interviews with jail detainees regarding methamphetamine abuse and manufacturing were useful to better understand the methamphetamine market. Perhaps most importantly, the program increased the local police department's understanding of the nature and extent of the methamphetamine problem. **I**

**Salt Lake City Police Department, Utah** took a multidisciplinary and interagency approach to combating the methamphetamine problem. These efforts involved the use of enhanced enforcement and prosecution, child endangerment laws and service providers, civil remedies to reduce neighborhood impacts, public awareness campaigns, and the formation of a methamphetamine training team. More than thirty city, county, and federal agencies were recruited to participate. These partnerships were organized into regularly meeting committees and sub-committees and formed the basis of this comprehensive prevention, intervention and enforcement program. This demonstrates how a large-scale project involving multiple agencies can create effective partnerships and interventions to combat methamphetamine problems. Having a committed project coordinator was central to the success of the partnerships and programs.



*This initiative has brought several organizations together where little contact or understanding existed before. The result has been outstanding cooperation and some real successes in dealing with various different aspects of the problem.* ”

Anonymous Respondent, Salt Lake City  
ILJ Methamphetamine Evaluation 2002.

**Minneapolis Police Department, Minnesota** focused on impeding the flow of methamphetamine before it became a serious problem and preparing for the likely increase in its manufacture, distribution, and use. The department first engaged in comprehensive data collection to obtain information on the extent and nature of the drug problem. Interviews with probationers and drug court clients were conducted and were helpful in developing a program. For example, this analysis confirmed police suspicions that, when compared to users of other drugs, methamphetamine users were more likely to be white and employed. They also primarily purchased methamphetamine from residences as opposed to the street. The methamphetamine initiative also helped to improve the relationship among local law enforcement agencies. Key law enforcement players were regularly brought together to share information and effective communication occurred among them. Comprehensive training materials were developed including a general training video on lab identification and a video dealing specifically with methamphetamine identification at traffic stops. The department also developed resource guides for businesses and neighborhoods. The department trained community groups, officers, transit, housing, sanitation, and park employees who may come into contact with clandestine methamphetamine labs.



## Equipment and Chemicals Commonly Used for Methamphetamine Cooking

### Household Equipment

Tempered Glass Baking Dishes  
Glass Pie Dishes  
Glass or Plastic Jugs  
Bottles  
Measuring Cups  
Turkey Baster  
Glass Jars  
Funnels  
Coffee Filter  
Blender  
Rubber Tubing  
Paper Towels  
Rubber Gloves  
Gasoline Can  
Plastic Tote Box  
Tape  
Clamps  
Hotplate  
Strainer  
Aluminum Foil  
Propane Cylinder (20-lb.)

### Chemicals (Source)

Ephedrine (Cold and Allergy Medicine)  
Pseudoephedrine (Cold and Allergy Medicine)  
Alcohol (Rubbing/Gasoline Additive)  
Toluene (Brake Cleaner)  
Ether (Engine Starter)  
Sulfuric Acid (Drain Cleaner)  
Methanol (Gasoline Additive)  
Lithium (Camera Batteries)  
Trichloroethane (Gun Scrubber)  
Anhydrous Ammonia (Farm Fertilizer)  
Sodium Hydroxide (Lye)  
Red Phosphorous (Matches)  
Iodine (Veterinarian Products)  
Sodium Metal (Made from Lye)  
MSM (Animal Food Supplement)  
Table Salt/Rock Salt  
Kerosene  
Gasoline  
Muriatic Acid  
Campfire Fuel  
Paint Thinner  
Acetone

Source: [www.streetdrugs.org](http://www.streetdrugs.org)

## What Can Be Done About Clandestine Drug Labs?

The COPS Office has produced a series of Problem-Oriented Guides for Police to assist police in identifying potential factors and underlying causes of specific problems, identifying known responses to each problem, and providing measures to assess the effectiveness of the responses. One of these guides focuses on the problem of clandestine drug labs (by Michael Scott, 2002). A variety of illicit drugs are produced in such labs, including methamphetamine, amphetamines, MDMA (ecstasy), methcathinone, PCP, LSD, and fentanyl, although methamphetamine typically accounts for 80 to 90 percent of the labs' total drug production. Thus, the problem of clandestine drug labs is



closely tied with the problems associated with methamphetamine abuse. A brief summary of the major findings of this publication, titled *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police: Clandestine Drug Labs* are discussed below; however, it is recommended that readers obtain the entire guide which can be found online at the COPS Web site ([www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)) or can be ordered by calling the U.S. Department of Justice Response Center at 800.421.6770.

*The Problem-Oriented Guides for Police: Clandestine Drug Labs* publication offers a series of critical questions that police agencies should ask in analyzing their particular drug lab problem. Although answers may not always be readily available to these questions, they are important because they will help agencies choose the most appropriate response to their particular methamphetamine problem. The guide includes lists of questions on the characteristics of drug labs, the victims of drug labs, offenders, chemical supplies, and current responses. It also offers a series of possible responses to clandestine drug labs and details some of the issues surrounding each option.

For example, with respect to "Finding and Seizing Labs" as a response, the author notes that although this is a common response, in the long term this may not be the most effective or efficient strategy for dealing with the problem. Smaller labs are easy to set up and nearly impossible to find. In addition, because seizing labs is time consuming and costly, police agencies may exhaust all of their resources on this single response, leaving no resources for other responses.

A more effective approach may be "Controlling the Sale of Precursor Chemicals." This strategy requires efforts at all levels of government (in terms of enforcement and enacting regulatory laws). Laws can be enacted that limit the purchase of large quantities of precursor chemicals and cash registers can be programmed to flag suspicious purchases. Even in the absence of such laws, local police can be involved in education efforts for chemical manufacturers and distributors (including local retailers), deliverers, and other regulators that may lead to increased offender identification. These groups can improve record keeping, container labeling, and engage in large quantity purchasing customer identification. In addition, laws can be enacted to encourage the safe storage of anhydrous ammonia (used in methamphetamine production) that is frequently stolen from such places as farmers' storage tanks.



Police departments cannot effectively fight a methamphetamine problem through enforcement alone. As the author states, "It is critical that agencies tailor responses to local circumstances and that each response can be justified based on reliable problem analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Police responses alone are seldom effective in solving the problem."

### **Possible Responses to Clandestine Drug Labs:**

- Finding and Seizing Labs
- Arresting and Prosecuting Lab Operators
- Seizing Lab Operator Assets
- Enforcing EPA Laws Against Operators
- Filing Civil Actions Against Properties Used for Labs
- Controlling the Sale of Precursor Chemicals
- Training Citizens to Report Suspected Labs
- Training Sales Clerks to Report Suspicious Purchases
- Training First Responders in Lab Identification and Clean-up
- Providing Child Protective Services to Children Exposed to Labs
- Providing Adequate Treatment Resources for Users

### **Additional Resources**

To receive a copy of *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police: Clandestine Drug Labs* please contact the U.S. Department of Justice Response Center at 800.421.6770. To download any of the Problem-Oriented Guides for Police or ILJ's complete *National Evaluation of the COPS Methamphetamine Initiative* please visit COPS online [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov).

Other useful web sites include:

Office of National Drug Control Policy [www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

National Institute on Drug Abuse [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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To obtain details on COPS programs, call the  
U.S. Department of Justice Response Center at 800.421.6770  
Visit the COPS internet address listed below.

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