

The Environmental Toxicology Section has produced this fact sheet to answer some basic questions about methamphetamine and illegal meth labs.

What is Meth?

The drug called “meth,” or methamphetamine, is a toxic and highly addictive drug. Meth is produced illegally by “cooking” it in makeshift labs. It can be found in the form of pills, powder, and chunks, and can be smoked, snorted, injected, or ingested. Meth is developed from amphetamines, but has a much stronger effect on the central nervous system. Meth is also known as crank, crystal, speed, and ice.

How to Recognize a Meth Lab

A typical meth lab will contain chemical bottles, pressurized cylinders, hoses, and bottles or “blister packs” of ephedrine. The cylinders may be in the form of modified propane tanks, fire extinguishers, scuba tanks, or soft drink dispensers, and usually contain anhydrous ammonia or hydrochloric acid. Both of these chemicals are poisonous and corrosive.

Meth labs may be set up at campgrounds, rest areas, houses (especially rentals), motel rooms, apartments, abandoned cars, garages, storage sheds, barns, and vacant buildings. They are frequently abandoned, leaving behind toxic and potentially explosive chemicals. You may also find chemicals dumped in the woods or along roadsides.

Warning Signs of Living Near a Lab

- Building with windows blacked out
- Red to orange stains in the bathroom and/or kitchen
- Increased activity, especially at night
- Excessive trash
- Strong odor of solvents, or other lab-related materials:

Odor	Description	Acute Effect
Ether-like	Sweet or aromatic odor often accompanied by a sweet taste. Commonly described as a “hospital odor”	Nasal irritation, nausea, headache, dizziness
Ammonia-like	Sharp, irritating odor similar to that from wet diapers, cat urine, glass cleaners, cattle feed lots, or fertilizers	Eye, nasal, and systematic irritation
Vinegar-like	Typical pungent, acrid, or sour odors found in vinegar, mayonnaise, salad dressings, or pickled food	Eye, skin, nasal, and systematic irritation

Solvent-like	Sweet odor from common solvents used in paint thinners, adhesives, cleaning fluids. Types of odors often found at auto-body or furniture refinishing shops	Eye, skin, and nasal irritation, nausea, headache, dizziness
--------------	--	--

Common Meth Lab Supplies (continued)

- Glass containers
- Coffee filters with red stains
- Funnels
- Rock salt, iodine
- Lithium batteries
- Hydrogen peroxide
- Ephedrine or pseudoephedrine tablets (decongestants)

If You Suspect a Meth Lab

Do not enter a site that you think may be used for cooking meth. Labs present extreme danger ranging from exposure to hazardous chemicals to explosion.

Drug labs are considered hazardous waste sites and should only be entered by properly trained and equipped professionals.

Never handle materials you suspect were used for making meth – skin contact can result in burns and poisoning. Some of the chemicals may also explode on contact with water or air, so don't handle them. If you suspect a meth lab, call your local sheriff's department. In an emergency, call 911.

Common Meth Lab Supplies

The following objects and chemicals are usually associated with illegal meth labs:

- Plastic tubing
- Mason jars
- Empty cans of toluene, alcohol, or paint thinner
- Propane tanks (sometimes spray painted or burned, with valves that are bent or have been tampered with)
- Camp stove fuel
- Empty pill bottles
- Ammonia
- Starter fluid

Technical Contact: Oregon DHS, Drug Lab Cleanup Program
800 NE Oregon Street, Suite 608, Portland, Oregon 97232

Phone: (503) 731-4012, Fax: (503) 731-4077

To receive this document in an alternate format, call (503) 731-4012

To learn more about methamphetamine or clandestine drug labs, visit these websites:

<http://www.dhs.state.or.us/publichealth/druglab/index.cfm>

<http://www.dea.gov>

<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/factsht/methamph/index.html>