



METHAMPHETAMINE LABS

Frequently Asked Questions

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PARTNERS FOR A SAFE GREELEY

A NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDING BLOCKS PROGRAM



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine is an illegal and potent central nervous system stimulant drug, also nicknamed meth, “crank”, “speed”, “crystal”, “ice”, and STP, among others. Also known as “the poor man’s cocaine” it is usually smoked, ingested, snorted or injected.

Some Methamphetamine sold on the street is white, but may also be yellowish, pink, blue, purple or even brown in appearance and have the consistency of damp powdered sugar. It may also appear as transparent a shard (glassy like ice) which explains how some of its nicknames are derived. Meth is often sold in small zip-type plastic bags.

This drug is extremely addictive.

How would users be recognized?

Occasional users of this drug may not have any obvious signs; however chronic meth addicts and “cooks” (those who manufacture the drug) may have open sores on their skin, bad teeth and hair, can be extremely thin with sunken facial features and generally appear unclean and look as though they get very little sleep.

Meth use may also be indicated by dilated pupils, sweating, dry mouth, flushed skin and tremors. Aggressive, psychotic and paranoid behaviors, irritability, anxiety, and auditory and visual hallucinations are also potential meth use indicators. Long term effects from meth use are extensive and may include cardiac and neurological damage.

What is a Clandestine Drug Lab?

A clandestine drug lab is defined as a covert or secret illicit operation combining apparatus and chemicals to manufacture an illegal (controlled) substance.

Methamphetamine is the most predominate drug manufactured in clandestine labs, however, LSD, Ecstasy, Hashish and PCP are other types of drugs that have been found in such labs as well.

What are signs of a Meth Lab?

Any one particular activity may not necessarily indicate a problem. However, a *combination* of the following behaviors or presence of materials may indicate that drug dealing or methamphetamine production may be occurring:

- The odor of ether, solvents (Coleman fuel), ammonia, or other chemicals not typically associated with a residential use (see list at end of this handout);
- The presence of hot plates, scientific glassware such as flasks, beakers, rubber tubing and condensers;
- Occupant takes household garbage to another property or location for disposal or does not put trash out regularly and allows it to accumulate;
- A high volume of pedestrian or vehicular traffic at all hours, often remaining at the home only for a brief time. Traffic may increase on certain days, during the weekend or late at night;
- Various obvious signs of drug use, such as people exchanging packets for cash, using drugs while sitting in their cars, or syringes or other paraphernalia lying around;
- Refusal of entry into the dwelling;
- Extensive security precautions, cameras on the outside of the house or in trees, blackened windows or curtains always drawn;
- Removal or covering of smoke detectors;
- Water running in bathrooms or kitchen facilities for long periods of time;
- The presence of bottles or jars filled with various two-layered liquids (such as occurs with oil and vinegar), but are not oil and vinegar;
- Reddish-brown stained measuring cups, turkey basters, funnels, coffee filters, beds sheets, rubber tubing, paper towels, or rubber gloves;
- Plastic tote box containing tubing, glassware, clamps, heat element, chemicals, stained gloves or filters, kitty litter, cold medication, matches, lithium batteries, jars or bottles with suspicious liquids, coffee filters, bottles, gas cans or jars with tubing protruding from them;
- Propane cylinder (20-lb) with blue discolored valve, a large quantity of fuel products or solvents (such Coleman fuel lighter fluid, toluene, mineral spirits, starting fluid), acids or other chemicals (hydrogen peroxide, HEET gas line cleaner, tincture of iodine, iodine crystals, Red Devil Lye);
- Quantities of small “zipper”-type plastic bags;
- Large amounts of cold medication, diet pills or blister packs from ephedrine products (such as Sudafed), cases of matches, especially if disassembled and striker plates cut off;
- Books or internet “recipes” for cooking meth;

- The presence of any obvious evidence, such as bags of white powder, syringes, burnt aluminum foil, glass pipes or other drug paraphernalia;
- Garbage containing broken glassware, or other chemical paraphernalia, numerous bottles or containers of a single solvent or chemical product as noted above, stained coffee filters (pink, blue, yellowish-red), or a large quantity of the other materials as described in this list.

What Hazards Exist with a Meth Lab?

Activity in these labs is illegal so they may be set up for concealment rather than with any idea of safety. The persons running the lab do not typically have any education in chemistry and may be experimenting with products and a process that have a high risk of fire, explosion, chemical and thermal burns. In addition to the dangers of the actual drug production, violence associated with drug trafficking is not uncommon. The extent to which meth producers may go to conceal and protect their activity, such as with booby traps, weapons and extreme and dangerous security systems is another possible risk with these operations.

Numerous hazards exist from the potential toxicities from the chemicals and gases produced from the manufacturing process. Exposure to chemicals used in the manufacturing process can damage the central nervous system, liver and kidneys and burn or irritate the skin, eyes, nose and throat. Cancer, short-term and permanent brain damage and immune and respiratory system problems have all been associated with the chemicals and fumes that permeate the walls, carpets, draperies, plaster and wood from meth labs.

Children living in a lab environment are at heightened risk for neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse as well as the exposure to methamphetamine or other dangerous chemicals, booby traps, violence, weapons and pornography.

What are the Health Risks Associated with a Meth Lab?

This depends on the specific chemical agent to which the individual was exposed, as well as the type of exposure, concentration of toxic chemicals and duration. However, most reported acute effects are either caustic/corrosive (affecting the skin, eyes and other mucous membranes) or respiratory (e.g. wheezing, coughing). Some hydrocarbon solvents can cause central nervous system depression if inhaled in high concentrations. The more concentrated and longer duration exposures are generally more serious, though brief exposures to some highly toxic agents such as phosphine and iodine vapor may also be life-threatening.

What should be done if a Meth Lab is suspected or found?

Leave immediately. Since you do not know which chemicals are present, whether the place is booby trapped, or how clean the operation is you could be in danger by simply being there. Do not open containers or attempt to smell any item or the contents of any container. Do not turn on, turn off unplug or touch anything. If you are not sure you have discovered a lab, don't stay to investigate but make a mental note of what has caused your suspicions and leave.

Clean up and check your health. If you were present in the building where the suspected meth lab was present, as soon as possible, wash your face and hands using lots of water (*do not use a washrag or 'wet wipe'*) and check your physical symptoms. Itchy skin, a burning sensation in the eyes, nose and/or throat, tightness in the chest, metallic taste in the mouth, and/or a headache that begins shortly after exposure to the area may signal that you are having reactions to the toxic chemicals from a meth lab “cook.” You could also experience a rash or chemical burn, such as a blister, if you brushed up against an object containing such contaminants. If you have concerns about how you are feeling, call your doctor, contact the emergency room, or call the poison control center for medical advice. If your safety is not compromised, stay in the area until law enforcement can respond to help evaluate your symptoms and determine if a meth lab is present.

Even if you feel no adverse effects, change your clothes and take a shower as soon as possible. Whether or not you can smell them, the chemical dust and vapors of an active meth lab can cling to clothing much the same way as cigarette smoke. In most cases, normal laundering will decontaminate the clothing.

Alert the police. Contact the Greeley Police Department at 350-9600. If you feel there is an emergency, call 911. These reports are investigated promptly due to the dangers associated with clandestine drug lab activity.

What happens when a Meth Lab is discovered by Law Enforcement?

The Greeley Police and Weld County Drug Task Force will take appropriate law enforcement actions which include apprehension of any parties associated with the meth lab production or related criminal activities, confiscation of evidence and materials related to the criminal activity, and removal of all persons from the property as well as providing their on-site decontamination. The Task Force will also contact the land owner (if different) to advise them of the evacuation of all persons from the property, contact the Weld County Health Department, and notify the City of Greeley Building Inspection staff, who will respond and placard the building as Unsafe and disallowed from entry.

The Building Inspection staff will immediately send a certified letter to the landowner further describing the evacuation of the building and prohibition from occupancy and describe the needed testing and clean-up and/or demolition of the property. In addition to this notification and placing a placard on the structure, the Inspection Division will also record this information at the Weld County Clerk and Recorder's office. A similar notice will be filed once property clean-up has been satisfied to indicate that the building has been cleared for occupancy once again.

What is Required of a Land Owner once a Meth Lab is found on a property?

State law requires the land owner to either clean-up the site or arrange for the demolition of the building. Local ordinances require the landowner to contact an Industrial Hygienist for a Preliminary Assessment and Work Program for the clean up. This Assessment must be completed and presented to the City Building Inspection Division

within 21 days of the discovery of the meth lab. Any work to be done to clean up the site must be completed within 120 days of the meth lab discovery. Once the work is complete a follow-up assessment must be performed by the Industrial Hygienist to demonstrate the structure is safe for re-occupancy.

The City Building Inspection staff can assist the land owner in working through the steps in this process and time extensions can be administratively granted when circumstances warrant and the landowner is making diligent efforts to address the required site clean-up.

How do I secure the services of an Industrial Hygienist and how expensive is that service?

You can find the names of Industrial Hygienists in the phone book or via the internet under commercial listings titled “Industrial Hygiene Consultants.” You should be sure the firm’s hygienists are qualified to perform the required work as provided for under state regulations. Several firms operate out of Northern Colorado and the Denver area. Links to these consultant lists can also be provided by the City Building Inspections staff.

While each circumstance is different, depending on the nature and extent of the meth lab “cook”, the following estimates have been provided relative to the costs involved with the evaluation and restoration work:

- Preliminary Assessment: \$1,500 represents an average cost for an initial hazard assessment and development of a clean-up plan by an Industrial Hygienist. The size of the house, any outdoor waste disposal into septic systems, etc. can affect cost. An assessment for a heavily contaminated property may run as much as \$6,000, depending upon the size and complexity of the situation, and if soils, septic systems, or vehicles need to be tested as well.
- Post Test: \$1,500 - \$2,500 is estimated for typical testing which is performed to verify the clean up work has successfully addressed hazard removal. The cost range will depend on the size of the structure and extent of the contamination, as determined during the preliminary assessment.
- Clean up activities: The extent of meth lab cook, duration of activity, and so forth will cause clean-up expenses to vary, but general experience has shown the cost for such work ranges from \$5,000 – \$15,000. This estimate does not include replacement of contaminated materials that had to be removed, such as carpeting or cupboards, and is in addition to the testing costs.

Additional Notes:

Methamphetamine is much more than a drug. It includes hazardous chemicals, toxic gases, deadly vapors, paranoid behavior and violence. Besides being illegal, clandestine laboratories are extremely dangerous. Explosion, fire, exposure to toxic chemicals and even unintended confrontation with meth “cooks” are all potential dangers. The cost of cleaning up such toxic contamination left behind is also high.

Clandestine labs have been discovered in a wide range of settings, from motel rooms and RVs to single family homes, rental units, garages and other out buildings. Generally, lab operators seek seclusion so settings that include dense trees or shrubs, remote building locations and settings well away from the easy view of others may favor such activity. Once the meth “cook” has the equipment in place and chemicals collected the actual manufacture of the drug can take place in a relatively short period. More experienced cooks can do it anywhere from 15 minutes to 5 hours for one batch. Not all meth production even requires cooking.

The information in this publication was prepared to help property owners, managers, and the general public recognize tenants, guests, customers and neighbors who may be accumulating a combination of materials for use in the manufacture of illegal substances.

Special Note to Neighborhoods:

Protect your family and property by doing a few minor but helpful things:

- Be alert to what is going on in your neighborhood;
- Set up and participate in a Neighborhood Watch group;
- Meet and get to know your neighbors;
- Know the landlords for any rentals in your neighborhood; if you notice anything suspicious, call the Police promptly (information can be provided anonymously.)

Special Note to Hotel and Motel Operators:

In addition to the information shared above, look for these indicators as well:

- Guests who list a local address at registration but indicate their intent to stay for several days;
- A willingness to pay for multiple nights in advance, particularly in cash;
- Guests who have several pieces of luggage and/or storage containers;
- Guests who provide no identification or credit card or report no vehicle (or provide inaccurate vehicle information);
- Refusal of maid service, or request to cancel service for the duration of the stay.

Housekeeping staff should be trained to be alert for the following conditions:

- chemical odors in guest rooms or the heavy use of air fresheners to mask such odors;
- suspicious stains, especially around the sink, tub or drain areas;
- cloth or coffee filters with unfamiliar stains or peculiar residue.

Special Note to Landlords:

Prevention is always the best way to avoid dealing with the dangerous situation of a meth lab and its costly clean-up. Checks a landlord may want to do on applicants may include a written rental history from prior landlords, a Colorado criminal/civil records search as well as out of state criminal records search. Private companies are available to check references and their fee can be offset by charging a “Tenant Screening Application Fee.”

More information on rental applications and reference checks may be obtained from the City of Greeley Community Development Department by calling 350-9380, checking the City website at www.greeleygov.com, or by stopping by the Greeley City Annex at 1100 10th Street (2nd floor, Urban Renewal Office). Information is also available through the Weld County Apartment Association (www.WeldCountyApartmentAssociation.com). Effort expended to carefully check tenant references before signing a lease may save considerable cost, time and trouble if it avoids renting to the wrong person.

Special Note to Retailers:

Efforts to prevent the illegal manufacture of methamphetamine include stronger control over the availability of the materials considered precursors to such drug production, specifically ephedrine-containing products. State law now limits the sale of more than three packets of a methamphetamine precursor drug or a combination of two or more methamphetamine precursor drugs in a single retail sale. The Greeley Municipal Code also requires that retailers dispense the product for sale from a controlled location and demonstrate that they have an employee training program in place to properly manage such sales.

Other things a retailer can do to help limit the illegal use of products to produce methamphetamine include:

- Understand and be alert to the indicators of possible drug lab activity described earlier in this packet;
- Require that each person who purchases suspicious items show a photo ID. Record driver’s license numbers or other identifying data from these documents;
- Visually check and then write down the license plate numbers of customers purchasing suspicious items;
- If the indicators are strong enough, consider refusing to sell the items to them;
- Call the Greeley Police Department immediately (350-9600) if you become convinced that a customer is purchasing items for use in the illegal manufacture of controlled substances. Do not get into a confrontation with the individual or attempt to detain them; instead, obtain as much information as possible to provide the police as soon as reasonable to do so.

It's the Law

Laws associated with methamphetamine clean-up and sale of precursors for meth production at the state and local level include the following:

Colorado House Bill 05-1110: (C.R.S. 18-18-412.8)	Concerning the Retail Sale of Methamphetamine Precursor Drugs
Greeley Ordinance No. 70, 2005	An Ordinance Amending Chapter 10.26 of the Greeley Municipal Code Adding Provisions to Limit the Sale of Pseudoephedrine – Containing Products <i>(provided minor correction to original Greeley Ordinance 41, 2005, adopted earlier)</i>
Colorado Senate Bill 05-217 & Colorado House Bill 04-1182 (C.R.S. 25.18.5-101-105)	Concerning the Mitigation of Potential Health Hazards Posed by Property Contaminated by an Illegal Drug Laboratory and Standards for the Cleanup of such Laboratories
Greeley Ordinance No.40, 2005	An Ordinance Amending Section 116.1 of the International Existing Building Code, 2003 Edition, Setting Forth the Time Period Allowed for the Rehabilitation or Removal of a Building Declared as Unsafe as a Result of Association with the Manufacture of Methamphetamine

Reference Information - *Chemical (source) linked with meth production:*

Ephedrine (cold & allergy medicine, some fitness/workout products),
Pseudo ephedrine (cold & allergy medicine)
Alcohol (rubbing or denatured)
Toluene (brake cleaner)
Ether (engine starter)
Sulfuric Acid (drain cleaner)
Methanol (gasoline additive, HEET)
Lithium Metal (camera/lithium batteries)
Anhydrous Ammonia (farm fertilizer)
Sodium Hydroxide (lye)
Red Phosphorus (matches/flares)
Iodine crystals (Veterinarian products)
Tincture of Iodine/Providone Iodine
Hydrogen peroxide
Potassium Iodide
Hypophosphorous Acid
Mineral Spirits
Lighter fluid
Amonium Nitrate (farm fertilizer)
Sodium Metal (can be made from lye)
MSM (Animal Products)
Table Salt/Rock Salt
Kerosene, Gasoline, Campfire Fuel (Coleman)
Muriatic Acid
Paint Thinner
Acetone

Important Phone Numbers

City of Greeley Police	350-9600
Weld County Drug Task Force	353-0193
Weld County Health Department	304-6415
City of Greeley Building Inspection	350-9830



This information has been adapted from a number of public resources including
The National Crime Prevention Council
The North Metro Task Force &
City of Greeley Police Department
and is provided in this publication through the
City of Greeley
Community Development Department
1100 10th Street, Suite 202
Greeley, CO 80631
(970) 350-9780
www.greeleygov.com