



PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 01-12

March 28, 2012

DANGERS OF METHAMPHETAMINE PRODUCTION

(U) Pennsylvania has experienced a dramatic increase in the manufacturing of methamphetamine over the past several years. This upsurge poses a potential health and safety risk to our communities. Methamphetamine is an illicit drug that is “cooked” using many common household ingredients which can be volatile and generate by-products harmful to humans.¹ When elements used in the manufacturing process are combined, they emit toxic fumes and could cause chemical burns upon contact. The table below illustrates the growing number of methamphetamine laboratories and dumpsites discovered in Pennsylvania, as well as seizures of the drug in the past three years.²

(U) Toxic residue from the cooking process saturates everything it comes in contact with and can remain there for months or years if not properly sterilized. Since the chemicals can be inhaled, ingested, or absorbed through the skin, anyone coming in contact with instruments or areas that have been used in the manufacturing process is at risk. Acute exposure occurs over a relatively short time and produces symptoms that include: shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, dizziness, lack of coordination, chemical irritation, and burns to the skin, eyes, nose, or mouth. Acute exposure can even cause death in instances where toxicity levels are high or a person is particularly susceptible (i.e. pre-existing breathing problems). Less severe exposure can result in headaches, nausea, dizziness, fatigue, or lethargy, and can lead to other long-term health problems.³

Type	2009	2010	2011
Laboratories	20	37	62
Dumpsites	4	8	14
Seizures	15	20	12
Grand Total	39	65	88



(U) There are several methods used to produce methamphetamine. An increasingly popular process, known as the “one-pot” method, is of great concern as it is easily transported, as well as highly flammable and explosive; it can also resemble plastic, urine-filled bottles discarded along roadways, in garbage bins, or other areas.² The presence of solid material inside the bottom of the bottle is one possible way to differentiate between the two.

(U) Not only is the cooking process dangerous, but approximately five to seven pounds of chemical waste is generated for every pound of methamphetamine produced. This waste is highly toxic and should be disposed of as hazardous material, but is often buried near the manufacturing site, dumped along roadways or into waterways, poured down drains, or placed in common household garbage.¹ This increases the likelihood that unsuspecting individuals could come in contact with the harmful material. Also, the toxic residue from the cooking process remains on those items and could harm innocent persons who encounter them.



(U) Some common materials discarded include:

- Propane tanks
- Plastic bottles with plastic tubing attached
- Coffee filters containing a white substance or dark red sludge
- Glass cookware or frying pans containing a powdery residue
- jars containing a clear liquid with a white- or red-colored solid on the bottom
- Stripped lithium batteries.



(U) This year alone, five “dumpsites” were found by road crews, along mostly rural roads, in Columbia County. Plastic bottles containing clear liquids, with tubing on the top, were found to still be generating dangerous hydrochloric acid. Additionally, a few one-pot laboratories were discovered still under pressure and at risk of exploding.

(U) A particularly dangerous incident occurred in Somerset County when several partially-submerged plastic bags were discovered in a stream along a rural roadway. When members of the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) Clandestine Laboratory Response Team (CLRT) responded and moved the bags, the chemicals reacted with the water and air, causing the bags to ignite.²



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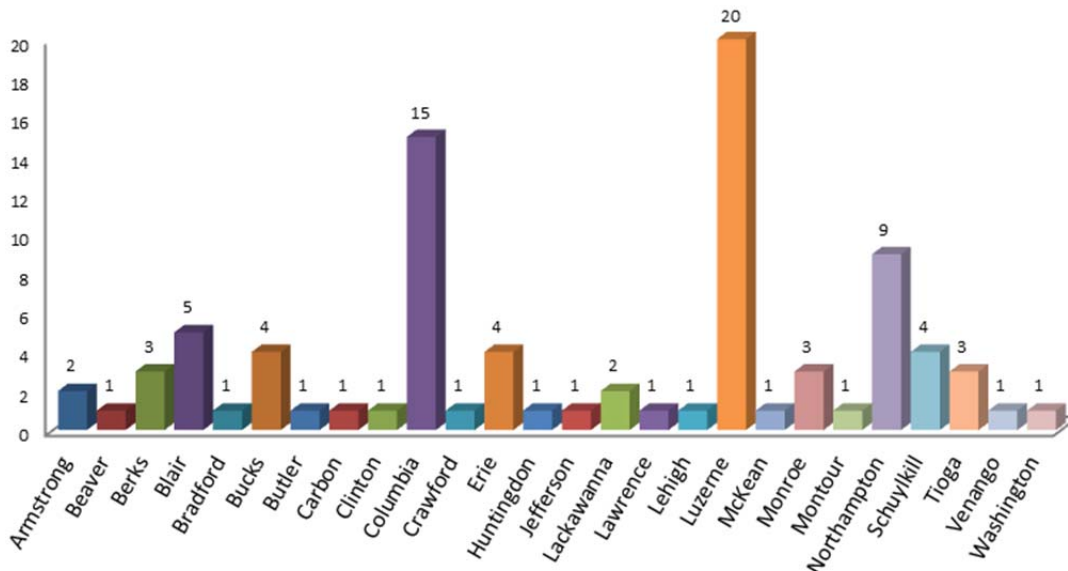
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(U) The chart below depicts the number of incidents involving methamphetamine laboratories, dumpsites, and seizures of the drug, by county.²

2011 Methamphetamine Incidents by County



RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

(U) Citizens should immediately contact 9-1-1 if they discover a possible methamphetamine laboratory or hazardous waste from a laboratory. All necessary precautions should be taken to minimize the risk of exposure, contamination, or physical injury.

- **DO NOT** touch anything.
- **DO NOT** turn on or off any nearby electrical power or light switches.
- **DO NOT** eat or drink near methamphetamine laboratory materials.
- **DO NOT** smoke anywhere near methamphetamine laboratory materials.
- **DO NOT** open or move containers with chemicals or suspected chemicals.
- **DO NOT** sniff any containers.
- **DO NOT** attempt to dilute a suspected one-pot laboratory with water (the lithium metal is water-reactive and can ignite or explode when exposed to water).
- **DO** remain upwind and uphill from hazardous substances to avoid contamination.
- **DO** decontaminate yourself and your clothing, especially before entering a vehicle.
- **DO** wash your hands and face thoroughly.
- **DO** report the incident to 9-1-1.

¹ Scott, M.S. and Dedel, D. (2006, August). Clandestine methamphetamine labs: 2nd edition. United States Department of Justice: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. Retrieved from <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID=29>.

² Pennsylvania State Police, Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Clandestine Laboratory Response Team.

³ Meth lab. (2010). Meth Kills: The Campaign Against Methamphetamine. Retrieved from <http://meth-kills.org/meth-lab.html>.