Methamphetamine Factsheet. 6/2007

Florida Office of Drug Control Information Brief

Methamphetamine: A Growing Problem

Methamphetamine addiction is growing in Florida. Producing meth endangers not only the cooker and the user, but also further threatens the health and welfare of all Floridians. Meth production and use also puts children at risk of contamination because they often play and breathe where chemicals are mixed.

What is Meth?

Methamphetamine is a synthetic stimulant with a high potential for abuse and addiction. One of its main ingredients is pseudoephedrine, which is found in many common cold medicines such as Sudafed.® Meth "cooks" use recipes found on the Internet to mix crushed cold tablets with dangerous chemicals to make methamphetamine. The removal of one oxygen molecule is the only chemical makeup disparity that separates pseudoephedrine from methamphetamine.

Health and Environmental Impact

The production of methamphetamine has a negative impact on humans and the environment. Concerns exist about continued human exposure to hazardous chemical residue remaining in buildings after the bulk chemicals of a meth lab have been removed. Research has shown that these meth residuals, reagent chemicals or reaction by-products can contaminate entire buildings. Research continues on the effects of human exposure to meth production; federal standards also have yet to be developed for the cleanup or remediation of chemical residuals found in former meth labs. For instance, what level of decontamination of carpets and air ducts is required to clear a former lab site? While meth lab cleanup of a building currently falls on the owner of the property, given the importance of tourism to Florida's economy, we may need to develop a protocol for hotel room decontamination.

Methamphetamine production also has a corrosive impact on the environment. Chemical containers are often stockpiled onsite and are a proven source of contamination. Chemical containers are also often discarded in wooded areas, creeks, fields, etc. and this hazardous dumping can impact entire local ecosystems. In rural areas where meth is often made, septic tanks and drinking water wells can become contaminated.

Increase in Drug Admissions Related to Meth

Florida's treatment providers are seeing a marked increase in the number of adults and youth who are being admitted for substance abuse treatment with methamphetamine as their primary drug of choice. Statistics kept by the Department of Children and Families

Quick Facts

→Pseudoephedrine, the main ingredient in meth production, is found in most common cold medicines.

→ It only costs a few hundred dollars in common cold medicines and various chemicals to produce thousands of dollars of methamphetamine.

→Hazardous chemicals used in meth production include acetone, red phosphorous, sulfuric acid, and anhydrous ammonia.

→The cost for cleaning up a meth lab starts at $3,000, and can increase depending on the size of the lab.

→For every pound of meth that is produced, 5 to 6 pounds of hazardous waste is generated.

→Chronic meth use causes violent behavior, anxiety, confusion, aggression, and acute damage to the brain. Heavy users can develop formication, which causes the user to scratch at their skin thinking there are bugs crawling inside their body.

→Department of Children and Families statistics show that there were 1,293 admissions for treatment in 2005-06 with methamphetamine as their primary or secondary drug of choice.

Special Contributions: Drug Enforcement Administration, Fla. Dept. of Health, FDLE, Fla. Dept of Environmental Protection, Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association.

show that there were 1,293 admissions for treatment in 2005-06 with methamphetamine as their primary or secondary drug of choice. The number reporting amphetamine use just a decade ago was just 256. Evidence suggests that meth addicts present treatment providers with unique challenges. For instance, meth remains in a person's system for up to 24 hours as compared to an hour or so with cocaine. The resulting damage to the brain from this prolonged meth exposure translates to costly and problematic drug treatment.

Meth Lab Seizures

Meth labs pose a serious risk to law enforcement. Not only do these first responders often have to deal with violent meth addled suspects guarding their labs, they must also deal with the danger of being exposed to toxic chemicals. Special HAZMAT units must be called to remove the clandestine labs; cleanup costs often exceed $3,000. Smaller, rural Florida counties are particularly vulnerable to clandestine labs because of their limited law enforcement resources

Stopping Meth Before It Gets Worse

Clandestine labs started in California and the Pacific Northwest in the late '80s. Labs have since spread to the Great Plains, moved east of the Mississippi River, and are now spreading rapidly into the Southeastern US. In 2005 Congress passed a bill entitled the "Combat Meth Act," which limits the amount of single-ingredient pseudoephedrine products a person may purchase in 24 hours to 3.6 grams or 9 grams in 30 days. In 2005 Florida passed HB1347 limiting the quantity of single-ingredient pseudoephedrine products a person may purchase to 9 grams per transaction and places these products behind the counter. Florida also passed HB 1325 in 2006 to enhance provisions in HB 1347 penalizing meth producers who endanger children or injure first responders as a result of producing meth. This legislation seems to be effective as evidenced by the number of lab seizures beginning to drop. Unfortunately, DEA reports Methamphetamine is being transported into Florida in multi-pound increments by Mexican drug trafficking organizations based along the Southwest Border and California.