



The Methamphetamine Menace

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Meth is manufactured using common household ingredients.

For every pound of meth produced, about six pounds of toxic waste are left behind.

Three states make it a felony to illegally dispose of meth waste.

Methamphetamine, a.k.a. speed, crank or meth, is the fastest growing drug threat in America. It is inexpensive, easily made from readily obtainable chemicals and has a longer lasting effect than cocaine. Methamphetamine is highly addictive and can cause violent and psychotic behavior, according to the White House Office of Drug Control Policy. Side effects include convulsions, dangerously high body temperature, cardiac arrhythmia and stroke.

State Action

Precursors. Methamphetamine is manufactured using common household ingredients (precursor chemicals). Producers usually use cold medicines as the main component. Other items used to “cook” meth include chemicals derived from drain cleaners, lithium batteries, lantern fuel and starter fluid. Because the materials used to manufacture the drug are readily available, states have taken measures to regulate and criminalize these precursor substances. Last year, Indiana established an education program to help retailers recognize who may be purchasing chemicals for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine. The statute provides civil immunity for retailers who make a good faith effort to report such sales. Oklahoma requires manufacturers and wholesale distributors to keep, for three years, records of who purchases precursor substances. Many states have criminalized the possession of precursor chemicals or equipment if intent to manufacture the drug can be established. For example, North Dakota considers possession of more than 24 grams of a methamphetamine precursor as intent to violate the state’s controlled substance manufacturing laws.

Cleanup. Manufacturing meth creates hazardous waste and poses significant health and environmental hazards. Small-scale, clandestine labs are typically located on residential properties or in mobile units. For every pound of methamphetamine produced, about six pounds of toxic waste are left behind. After law enforcement officials seize a lab, the average cost of cleanup is about \$5,000, but it can climb to as much as \$150,000 for large-scale labs.

Oregon and Washington have had comprehensive drug cleanup laws for more than 10 years. The laws require a coordinated, cooperative effort among government agencies to manage the cleanup and requires owners to make sure residue levels are sufficiently low. Even if the property is properly cleaned, laws in at least four states specifically require real estate agents to disclose if the property was the site of a meth lab. Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and Oklahoma make the offender liable for cleanup costs. Michigan, Missouri and Wisconsin make it a felony to illegally dispose of methamphetamine waste.

Protecting Children. Methamphetamine is highly explosive during the manufacturing process. Exposure to the drug and the toxic substances used to make it also pose serious health

risks to children. Parental addiction can be devastating for children. Ten percent of users indicated that they were introduced to meth by their parents or other family members. A growing number of states have enacted legislation to address these problems. Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Utah and Washington have expanded their child abuse or endangerment statutes to include manufacturing a controlled substance in the presence of a child. Arkansas and Washington established a separate criminal offense for exposing a child to an illicit chemical substance. California made grant funds available to counties to establish multiagency drug-endangered child response teams.

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Sentencing. State sentencing legislation has focused on increasing penalties for the sale and manufacture of meth. Illinois eliminated probation in 2003 for repeat offenders caught with materials used to make the drug. The measure was enacted in part because methamphetamine dealers were coming to Illinois because it had less strict laws than bordering states. Some states have provided alternatives to incarceration or emphasize treatment for those who only use the drug. Colorado reduced the penalty for use or possession of one gram or less of Schedule I and II controlled substances in order to provide more resources for treatment. Iowa gives courts discretion to impose community-based treatment under a drug court program for first offenders, but provides that mandatory minimum sentences apply to subsequent offenses.

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Federal Action

The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) has dedicated \$223.5 million since 1995 to combat methamphetamine. These funds go directly to state and local law enforcement agencies for community policing activities that address methamphetamine. In 2002, \$70 million was allocated for enforcement. To support a variety of enforcement, intervention and prevention efforts, \$57 million has been allocated for FY 2003. In collaboration with the Drug Enforcement Agency, many of the grants will provide training on the proper collection, removal and destruction of clandestine methamphetamine labs.

There are federal funds available to combat meth.

Under a COPS grant in Salt Lake City, Utah, law enforcement officials developed a collaborative effort that includes 30 government agencies working together to combat the use and production of meth. The Drug Endangered Children program was also created to address the growing number of children exposed to meth, by combining the resources of law enforcement, the judicial system and social services.

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