



## CLEANING UP METH

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Methamphetamine is a toxic drug. It is toxic to the user and toxic to the environment, creating about 5 pounds of solid and hazardous waste for every pound of meth. Environmental issues that arise from meth labs include soil contamination, and toxic chemicals in sewage or septic systems. Opportunities to prevent meth pollution include meth-precursor laws that restrict purchases of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, and restrict access to anhydrous ammonia. Meth labs can be quickly assembled and disassembled in nearly any setting. Signs of an operating meth lab can include unusual quantities of sudafed boxes (or other decongestants), antifreeze, anhydrous ammonia, red phosphorus, denatured alcohol, hydrogen chloride, muriatic/hydrochloric acid, toluene, ether, common paint thinner, and epsom in the garbage. Meth labs are associated with strong chemical odors, resembling cat urine, ammonia or nail polish remover.<sup>1</sup> Burn pits, stained soil or dead vegetation can indicate dumped chemicals or waste from a meth lab.<sup>2</sup>

Toxins from methamphetamine production will permeate building materials and furnishings, including paint, flooring, vents, or furniture. Wastes dumped down sinks or toilets can lead to corroded pipes and contaminate water supplies and groundwater. Chlorinated solvents and other toxic by-products dumped outdoors will contaminate topsoil, groundwater, or surface water for years. Although the costs of meth cleanup vary per situation, the average cost is now estimated by the US Drug Enforcement Agency to be \$2,000-\$3,000 per lab<sup>3</sup>. The cost can be much higher.

Cleanup of meth labs is complicated; however, there are a few guidelines for how to properly handle the waste.

- Only trained professionals should deal with removing the meth lab waste.
- Law enforcement raid team equipment should consist of flashproof, fireproof outer clothing; air purification respirators and self-contained breathing equipment; gloves; and boots or booties. All equipment should be hosed off after exiting the contaminated environment and stowed in a garbage bag.
- Officers should not ventilate suspected methamphetamine labs unless told to do so by certified lab personnel.
- Officers should make notes of what they have seen (i.e., glassware, denatured alcohol, lye, etc.) and determine what condition the lab is in (not always possible due to safety considerations). Providing this type of information to the proper investigative personnel or departments will let them know what to expect when they inspect the lab.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.policeone.com/writers/columnists/ScottBuhrmaster/articles/80897/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.portlandonline.com/police/index.cfm?c=difje>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.dea.gov/concern/meth\\_environment.html](http://www.dea.gov/concern/meth_environment.html)

- Chemicals, containers, and materials transported in police cruisers and stored in evidence lockers will contaminate all areas with which they come in contact. \*The chemicals are often unstable and may be explosive or poisonous. Contact a trained professional to remove the waste.
- Do not attempt to salvage furnishings and appliances exposed to meth waste.
- Potential contamination to water, soils, or drainage systems should be reported to the state's agency for environmental protection.
- An example of a "Hazard Assessment & Recognition Plan (HARP)" is provided by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality; please go to: <http://www.deq.state.mt.us>

National Tribal organizations are addressing the meth problem. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and Montana State University Extension Housing and Environmental Health offer a "Tribal Meth Toolkit."<sup>4</sup> NCAI has other resources, such as "Methamphetamine In Indian Country: An American Problem Uniquely Affecting Indian Country - Creative Tribal Solutions."<sup>5</sup> The National American Indian Housing Council offers trainings on "Methamphetamine in Indian Housing."<sup>6</sup>

#### Additional Resources:

Stop Tribal Meth website: <http://www.stoptribalmeth.org/index.php>

US Drug Enforcement Agency: <http://www.dea.gov>

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention: <http://samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html>

Montana Meth Project: <http://www.montanameth.org>

National Crime Prevention Council: <http://ncpc.org>

National Health and Human Services Directory: <http://isafetynet.org>

National Institute on Drug Abuse: <http://drugabuse.gov>

White House Office of National Drug Control Policy: <http://whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>

Meth Resources (NDCP, DOJ and DHHS): <http://methresources.gov>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.stoptribalmeth.org/index.php>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ncai.org/ncai/Meth/Meth\\_in\\_Indian\\_Country\\_and\\_Creative\\_Tribal\\_Solutions\\_July.pdf](http://www.ncai.org/ncai/Meth/Meth_in_Indian_Country_and_Creative_Tribal_Solutions_July.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.naihc.net/leadershipinstitute/index.asp?bid=8438>