OFFICE OF OPERATIONS

NOTICE NO. 34

July 16, 1997

TO: All Personnel, Office of Operations

FROM: Director, Office of Operations

SUBJECT: **DANGERS OF CLANDESTINE METHAMPHETAMINE LABORATORIES**

EFFECTIVE: **Immediately**

PURPOSE

This Notice reminds Office of Operations (O.O.) personnel of the dangers of, and procedures for dealing with, clandestine methamphetamine labs. All O.O. personnel are also reminded to review Department Manual Section 4/212.49 "Investigations Involving Hazardous Materials", which addresses the proper procedures to follow when Department personnel come into contact with clandestine methamphetamine labs.

INFORMATION

Clandestine methamphetamine labs have proliferated at such a rate that California Law Officials now consider them major threats to the general public, law enforcement, and the environment. As these laboratories grow in size and capacity, large quantities of toxic, caustic and highly flammable chemicals will also be found, all of which pose a serious safety risk to law enforcement personnel.

There are varying methods of illicitly manufacturing methamphetamine. The common method consists of using red phosphorous and hydriodic acid. These two components are used in conjunction with ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or phenylpropanolamine. When heated to the proper temperature, amphetamine or methamphetamine is produced.

If during the manufacturing process these chemical combinations are overheated, the mixture may produce invisible lethal vapors or gases called phosphine or di-phosphine. This gas will ignite when it comes into contact with a spark or flame and may, when the gas reaches a certain concentration, spontaneously combust upon contact with the air.

Phosphine is a toxic gas whose long-term effects are not completely understood. If inhaled however, the gas may immediately affect the central nervous system, cause lung irritation, pulmonary edema, dilation of the heart and hyperemia of the visceral organs. The inhalation of this gas may also ultimately cause comas and convulsions, possibly resulting in death within 48 hours.

Phosphine is primarily used as a fumigant for the cleaning of electronic components and in chemical synthesis. Law enforcement generally will not encounter phosphine or di-phosphine in a form other than a vapor or gas as a result of the accidental overheating of the chemical components.

PROCEDURE

Personnel conducting an investigation or otherwise discovering an illicit laboratory, **shall** immediately secure the perimeter of the location, evacuate adjacent inhabited dwellings, request a field supervisor and notify the Clandestine Lab Squad, Narcotics Group (NG); the Hazardous Chemical Team, Scientific Investigation Division (SID) and the Fire Department. Entry **shall not** be made into the location without the authorization of the Clandestine Lab Squad, NG or the Hazardous Chemical Team, SID.

Questions regarding this Notice should be directed to Scientific Analysis Section, SID, at 237-0041 or Staff Services Unit, NG, at 485-4044.

B. C. Parks

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Director
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