



# TRAINING BULLETIN

LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT

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## "METHAMPHETAMINE"

Methamphetamine is a potent central nervous system stimulant with effects very similar to cocaine and is known by a variety of street names, including "meth," "speed," "crank," "ice," and "go-fast." Methamphetamine is called a "poor man's cocaine" because of its wide availability and low cost, is gradually becoming the most abused drug in the United States.

Knowledge of the drug is becoming increasingly important to law enforcement officers. The purpose of this bulletin is to present information on the identification, packaging, and signs and symptoms of methamphetamine usage, along with the safety procedures to employ while investigating clandestine laboratories.

Amphetamines were legitimately introduced in the 1930s as Benzedrine in over-the-counter inhalers for the treatment of colds, hay fever and nasal congestion. Amphetamines soon became a cure-all for helping truckers to complete their long routes without falling asleep, for weight control, for helping athletes to perform better and train longer, and for treating mild depression.

Intravenous amphetamine abuse spread among a subculture known as "speed freaks." With experience, it became evident that the dangers of abuse of these drugs outweighed most of their therapeutic uses.

Today, the drug is available by prescription in tablet form and is used in the treatment of the sleeping disorder narcolepsy; and to control the hyperactivity in children afflicted with the behavioral syndrome called attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), in whom amphetamines produce a calming effect.

Methamphetamine, a derivative of amphetamine, was synthesized in about 1917. Abbott Laboratories manufacture methamphetamine hydrochloride under the trade name of "Desoxyn" as a legitimate prescription drug for use in the treatment of obesity.

Illicit methamphetamine has become attractive to adolescents and college students because the drug is perceived to enhance them both mentally and physically. Some also believe that methamphetamine will turn them into sexual superstars, making it one of several drugs of choice in the club or "rave" scene.

#### **METHODS OF USE**

There are a number of ways of absorbing methamphetamine, such as ingesting it orally, injecting into the veins, snorting and smoking the drug.

- Oral. Methamphetamine is commonly mixed with coffee or cola beverages for oral ingesting. Some users wet the tip of their finger, stick it in the speed and then into their mouth. Users claim that by orally ingesting speed, there is no rush or flash (intense euphoria) like there is by injecting it. Users also claim that it takes up to 20 to 30 minutes, to feel any effect by oral investing.
- Snorting/Sniffing. Ingesting methamphetamine through the nose does not produce the intense rush as with injection; it does not last as long and also has a tendency to burn the nose. Younger abusers begin snorting the drug before advancing to smoking the drug.
- Injection. Injecting methamphetamine directly into the veins produces an instant rush or sense of euphoria.
- Smoking methamphetamine is very popular. A pipe is often used, but more common is a piece of aluminum foil. The foil is folded, and a trough is formed to hold the drug. The foil is heated from beneath with a match or lighter. As the methamphetamine melts, it turns into an odorless vapor. Users report an intense high is quickly achieved by inhaling the vapor through the mouth or nose.

### **IDENTIFICATION OF METHAMPHETAMINE**

Methamphetamine is manufactured almost exclusively in illicit laboratories; there is no standard for packaging, dosage levels, color, size, shape, or form of the final product.

Its form can appear as a clear crystalline called "ice" or "glass," the slang name for crystallized methamphetamine hydrochloride, or off-white chunks similar to rock cocaine. It can also have a light yellow or slightly pink color and appear slushy ("hydro").

It has also been seen as a milky white to yellow soft material ("snot"), and as a brown hard and soft chunk ("peanut brittle" or "peanut butter").

### **COMMON METHODS OF PACKAGING**

Typically, single doses of the drug are packaged in plastic zip-lock bags. It can be "cut" or diluted with milk sugar, or DMSO to achieve a particular level of purity. It is sold in pounds, ounces, and fractions of an ounce; an "eightball" is 1/8 ounce; a "teener" is 1/16 ounce.

### **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF METHAMPHETAMINE INFLUENCE**

Methamphetamine rightfully earns its street name, "speed." Methamphetamine increases the heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature and rate of breathing. The pupils dilate, or enlarge, and are slow to react to light stimulus (longer than one second). The eye movement is not impaired (horizontal and vertical gaze nystagmus, and lack of convergence should not be present).

Methamphetamine appeals to drug abusers because it increases the body's metabolism and produces euphoria, increases alertness, and gives the abuser a sense of increased energy. These drugs heighten alertness, elevate mood, and decrease fatigue reducing the need for sleep, but they often make users irritable and talkative.

Adverse physical consequences of methamphetamine abuse include the risk of stroke and heart failure. Muscle rigidity, tremors, and spasms are common. Violent and erratic behavior is frequently seen among chronic abusers of methamphetamines.

### **CLANDESTINE LABORATORIES**

Illegal methamphetamine is easily manufactured in clandestine laboratories with readily obtainable chemicals. A low-grade stimulant known as ephedrine is easily converted into methamphetamine. Restrictions on the availability of bulk ephedrine in the United States has forced illicit manufacturers to purchase common over-the-counter cold tablets containing either ephedrine or pseudoephedrine. Methamphetamine is then extracted from the tablets in a simple chemical separation process.

#### Indicators a Building may Contain a Clandestine Lab:

1. Strong chemical odors in the area and/or complaints from neighbors about strange smells coming from the property.
2. Heavy fortifications (i.e., bars on the windows).
3. Suspicious auto traffic and visitors to the site.
4. Chemical cans or drums in the yard.
5. People leaving the building just to smoke.
6. Bottles and boxes of cold medications.
7. Containers of "Red Devil" lye and/or red or brown stains on walls, counters or ceilings from the chemical.
8. Mason jars containing liquid that has separated.
9. Lengths of rubber tubing.

### **CLANDESTINE LABORATORY PRECAUTIONS**

Officers at the scene of a suspected clandestine lab should follow these fundamental rules of chemical safety to prevent injury, illness or even death:

- Use protective equipment (gloves, air masks, etc.)
- Don't smoke or eat in or near lab
- Don't touch your eyes, nose, mouth or other mucous membranes

- Don't turn anything on or off. The minor friction of flipping a light switch may trigger an explosion of the highly flammable chemicals used in clandestine labs
- Don't unplug anything (friction or even the smallest electrical charge may trigger an explosion).
- Don't taste, touch or directly smell any substance.

#### **INVESTIGATIONS INVOLVING HAZARDOUS MATERIALS (4/212.49)**

An employee becoming aware of the actual or suspected presence of a hazardous material which has been seized as a result of a police action shall immediately notify the Criminalistics Section, Scientific Investigation Division (SID), and request the assistance of the Fire Department. When SID is closed, notification shall be made to Detective Headquarters Division.

The term "hazardous material" means any chemical or mixture of chemicals which is toxic, corrosive, volatile, explosive, or flammable that has the capacity of inducing great bodily injury or illness or which has been determined to be capable of posing an unreasonable risk to health, safety, or property.

#### **Preliminary Investigations of Illicit Laboratories**

Officers shall not enter an illicit laboratory to apprehend suspects or to prevent the destruction of evidence, absent the authorization of the Illicit Lab Squad, Narcotics Division (ND), or Hazardous Chemical Team, SID.

When Entry Is Made Into A Location And A Laboratory Is Discovered, Officers Shall Immediately:

- Vacate the location
- Evacuate adjacent inhabited dwellings
- Request that a field supervisor respond to the scene
- Make the appropriate notifications:
  - ☎ Illicit Lab Squad, Narcotics Group (NG);
  - ☎ Hazardous Chemical Team, SID (If closed, contact Detective Headquarters Division for on-call personnel.), and
  - ☎ Fire Department

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No attempt shall be made to neutralize, move, or transport any hazardous material except under the direction of a SID specialist.

**OFFICER SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

Chronic methamphetamine abusers are often armed and are prone to violence. Officers should use extreme caution while investigating a clandestine laboratory. Booby traps have been encountered at lab sites and at stash locations where quantities of the drug are hidden.

FIELD TRAINING SERVICES UNIT  
CONTINUING EDUCATION DIVISION