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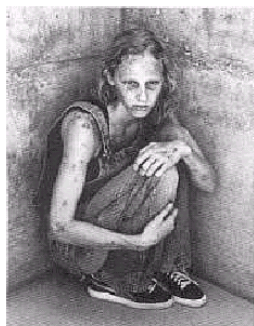
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## Methamphetamine A Rising Problem

**Methamphetamine** (Meth) use is approaching epidemic proportions in Snohomish County. The Sheriff's Office has been doubling meth lab busts each year over the last 3 to 4 years. Meth, which has been a big problem in King, Pierce and Thurston counties, has found a new home in Snohomish County.

Meth related investigations by the Snohomish Regional Drug Task Force amounted to 36 in 1998. In 2001, the task force investigated 116 cases, more than triple what it investigated in 1998. Plus, it handled another 77 reports of suspected meth labs and chemical dumps.

Finding a meth lab not only involves police and other parts of the criminal justice system (prosecutors and courts), it involves the county Health Department, and the state Department of Ecology. While the criminal justice system may punish the meth users and pushers, health officials have to coordinate the clean up of the lab site. Meth afflicts the individual who uses it for a long time with kidney, heart and lung disorders that can be fatal. It can also lead to brain and liver damage, malnutrition, blood clots and irreversible blood vessel damage in the brain. Meth pollutes the environment, including the soil, buildings and water, from its byproducts that

contain highly toxic acids and highly flammable solvents. The production process is so dangerous that fires and explosions are common at meth labs.

State services have also felt the affect of increased meth use. In the 1990's, admissions for treatment of meth skyrocketed from 980 cases in 1994 to 2,429 in 1995 and again increased to 4,500 in 1998. Between 1993 and 1998 admissions increased by 912%.

According to the state Department of Ecology, total reported meth labs in the state grew dramatically from 1996 to 1999: 1996- 153, 1997- 203, 1998- 340, 1999- 789.

Drug problems often cause other crimes that affect the community in general. In the 1990's, according to the Washington State Narcotics Investigators Association:

- 68% of users were involved in assault,
- 82% in burglary,
- 49% in child abuse,
- 61% in domestic violence,
- 86% in theft,
- 46% in mail theft,
- 49% check/credit card fraud, and
- 37% in auto theft.

The growth of meth use harms individuals, their families and the communities in which they live.

## Methamphetamine The Harm it Causes

**Methamphetamine** promises alertness, high energy, a feeling of pleasure and even a loss of weight. A meth high can last 8 to 12 hours, much longer than a cocaine high. But the down side includes rapid addiction, paranoia, and ultimately death.

Meth acts as a stimulant increasing a person's energy and alertness and suppressing appetite. Acting like dopamine, meth gives the user a rush of pleasure, then it fools the brain into releasing even more dopamine. This over abundance of dopamine eventually deadens the brain to the chemical, requiring more chemical to achieve the same high.

Meth users often are characterized by high levels of energy, sometimes taking on projects with obsessed passion, not necessarily completing them. They may be agitated, speak excitedly, and lose weight. Meth users may also have: dilated pupils, high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, chest pain, shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, and elevated body temperature. From time to time they may exhibit episodes of sudden and violent behavior, intense paranoia, visual and auditory hallucinations, and bouts of insomnia. Finally, they may compulsively clean and groom and repetitively sort and disassemble mechanical objects, such as cars.

Long term use can cause the meth user to have a gaunt appearance, develop poor hygiene and have rotting or missing teeth. They can also develop sores from scratching (thinking that they have bugs under their skin).

Meth is both sold and made by users. It is relatively easy to make, with recipes passed from meth cooker to cooker. The ingredients are inexpensive to purchase and are available at most local stores (see sidebar for ingredients). For a few grams of "product" an enormous amount of caustic waste is also produced and often released to the environment.

Cookers will pour flammable solvents, strong acids, and chemicals that can cause burns down the drain, into the back yard, or into streams. The fumes from the chemicals often permeate walls, ceilings, floors and furniture in the building. The cooking process has been known to cause explosions and fires.

There are hundreds of names for meth, but ultimately "**bad news**" is the name for meth.

## How To Know If You Have a Meth Lab in your Neighborhood

- *Large amounts of cold tablet packaging containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine*
- *Large quantities of Coleman stove fuel, paint thinner, acetone, starting fuel, Red Devil lye, drain cleaners containing sulfuric acid, bottles of muriatic or hydrochloric acid.*
- *Large numbers of lithium batteries, especially batteries that have been taken apart.*
- *Bottles or jars with rubber tubing attached.*
- *Portable propane tanks with fittings that have turned blue.*
- *Glass cookware or frying pans containing a powdery residue.*
- *Coffee filters containing substances that obviously aren't coffee.*
- *Strange smells emanating from the building.*
- *Neighbors who only smoke outside of their house*



*An explosion in a meth lab started the fire that destroyed this building in Thurston County.*

## Methamphetamine— Where To Go For Help

**Meth labs** are bad news. They are bad news for the cooks and their customers. They are bad news for their families and for their neighbors. For the community, the fear of violence, the potential of theft, and the fear of health problems and environmental damage makes meth labs an unwelcome situation.

Meth labs may be set up at campgrounds, rest areas, rental homes, motel rooms, abandoned cars, garages, storage sheds, barns, and vacant buildings. Chemicals may also be burned or dumped in woods or along roads. A typical meth lab is a collection of chemical bottles, hoses and pressurized cylinders. The cylinders can take many forms, from modified propane tanks to fire extinguishers, scuba tanks and soda dispensers. The tanks contain anhydrous ammonia or hydrochloric acid – both highly poisonous and corrosive.

If you suspect a meth lab in your neighborhood, **DO NOT ENTER IT!**

Never handle materials you suspect were used for making meth. Drug labs are considered hazardous waste sites and should only be entered by trained and equipped professionals. Call the NW HIDTA (Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area), 1-888-609-6384.

While the immediate area where the meth lab resides is dangerous, neighboring

buildings are probably not affected. If you do have concerns about your health, talk to your doctor.

Landowners and landlords can face an expensive cleanup before their house or rental can be occupied again.

Once a meth lab is "busted", the local health department will evaluate the building to determine whether it is habitable. Those who entered the building (police, suspects, etc.) are decontaminated. Landowners will be responsible for clean up. The building can not be entered until the health department tests show that it has been cleaned by a certified cleanup company. The state notes that a meth lab existed on the property deed.

For the meth lab cooks and users, there is possible jail time. Often kids are found amongst the chemicals and filth of drug labs. They have to be taken to an already overburdened foster care system. While difficult to go through, treatment is a possibility. For information on treatment programs call The National Institute on Drug Abuse's Toll -Free Treatment Information and Referral Hotline- (800) 662-HELP (4357) or the Washington State Alcohol/Drug Clearinghouse- (800) 662-9111.



Response team cleaning chemical waste in a backyard.

## Phone Numbers That Can Help

- *HIDTA (Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) Tip Line- (888) 609-METH (6384).*
- *Snohomish Regional Narcotics Task Force Tip Line- (425) 316-8762.*
- *For confidential assistance and guidance call The Alcohol/Drug 24-hour HelpLine, (800) 562-1240.*
- *Young adults experiencing personal crises or drug abuse issues can call TeenLine- (206) 722-3700 or (800) 562-1240.*
- *The National Institute on Drug Abuse's Toll -Free Treatment Information and Referral Hotline- (800) 662-HELP (4357).*
- *Washington State Alcohol/Drug Clearinghouse- (800) 662-9111.*



# COMMUNITY POLICING in Snohomish County

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**1-800-  
CRIME-  
13**

### Sheriff Office Precincts:

- North-  
(425) 388-7939
- South-  
(425) 744-6868
- East-  
(360) 805-6770
- Crime Prevention  
Center (128th S.W.)  
(425) 710-0232

## Methamphetamine – Where To Go For More Information

There are many, many web sites that address meth. Among the best are:

- **Koch Crime Institute:** [http://www.kci.org/mthe\\_info/links.htm](http://www.kci.org/mthe_info/links.htm)
- **The Herald series on Meth in Snohomish County:** <http://www.heraldnet.com/specialreports/methseries.cfm>
- **The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information:** <http://www.health.org/catalog/ordersystem2.asp?Topic=6>
- **Washington State Alcohol/ Drug Clearinghouse:** <http://www.adhl.org/clearinghouse/>
- **Washington State Department of Health:** <http://www.doh.wa>
- **NW HIDTA (Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area):** <http://www.mfiles.org/methweb/home/home.html>
- **NIDA (National Institute on Drug Abuse):** <http://www.nida.nih.gov/ResearchReports/Methamph/Methamph.html>