

Meth Labs Becoming An Increasing Problem For Hazmat Specialists

Illegal Methamphetamine production in clandestine makeshift labs have created a new hazard and increasing problem for hazmat specialists to contend with.

Methamphetamine labs are being found in many different types of locations and not just limited to houses or apartments. Other clever places such as abandoned scrapped out vehicles or even motels are also being used. The numbers of meth labs discovered by police agencies are increase rapidly each year with no end in sight.

Meth labs are extremely dangerous and even being in the vicinity of a an illegal lab could mean injury or death. The dangerous chemicals involved in the production of meth will leave behind hazardous waste residue. Many of the ingredients that are being used in meth production are many common household chemicals that can be found in household cleaners and paints. These chemicals include benzene and methylene sometimes chloride or trichloroethane and toluene. Methamphetamine may also include other chemicals and solvents such as phosphorous iodine and metals.

When combining these chemicals they can ignite causing explosions or fires and release toxic fumes into the air. Most times when the waste is disposed of outdoors it will lead to permanent damage to the environment and our water supply. Invisible vapors can seep into plaster and wood or other porous substances found in the home. Liquids that are discarded will leave a toxic residue in bathtubs and sinks.

During the illegal production of meth many contaminants are used in the process that can be harmful if you are exposed. These chemicals can cause health problems such as respiratory problems or skin and eye irritation. Acute exposures to high levels of these chemicals such as those encountered by hazmat specialists when dismantling a lab can cause severe health problems including lung damage and serious chemical burns to many different parts of the body.

Not much is currently known about the health effects from long term exposure to contaminants left behind after a meth lab is dismantled. Extreme caution must be used and the strictest regulatory cleaning practices implemented to avoid contamination to outside sources. Because of this reason meth labs are considered to be hazardous waste locations and should only be entered by trained and equipped hazmat response professionals. Any location that once contained a crystal-meth lab needs to be properly decontaminated and can remain unlivable for quite some time.

Unfortunately because this is a new problem we are facing there is currently no official protocol or regulations in place on how to dismantle and decontaminate a crystal meth lab property.

Until these protocols are developed and put in place dismantling methamphetamine labs will pose certain unknown risks to trained hazmat specialists and law enforcement personnel.

About the Author

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