



WHAT METHAMPHETAMINE IS COSTING YOU

May 12, 2006

SUMMARY

According to local law enforcement and social services agencies, crimes related to the use, possession, and manufacture of methamphetamine have reached epidemic proportions in Mendocino County. The intent of this report to help the community to identify the symptoms of methamphetamine use, its affect on the environment, and the programs and services that are available to victims of methamphetamine in Mendocino County.

BACKGROUND

Amphetamines were originally intended for use in nasal decongestants and bronchial inhalers and do have limited medical applications. Methamphetamine, a derivative of amphetamine, is a powerful stimulant that affects the central nervous system. Methamphetamine can be smoked, snorted, orally ingested, and injected; it is accessible in many different forms and may be identified by color, which ranges from white to yellow and darker colors such as red and brown. Methamphetamine is also known as "speed" or "crystal" when it is swallowed or snorted, as "crank" when it is injected, as "ice" or "glass" when it is smoked.

Household products contain most of the necessary chemicals to complete the manufacturing process. Items such as isopropyl or rubbing alcohol, brake cleaner, engine starter, drain cleaner, matches, road flares, salt, iodine, batteries, gun scrubber, MSM, sodium metal, gasoline additives, muriatic acid, farm fertilizer, lye, cold tablets containing pseudo-ephedrine or ephedrine, acetone and cat litter can be used. The necessary equipment is just as common: Pyrex or Corning dishes, bottles, paper towels, coffee filters, thermometers, cheesecloth, funnels, blenders, rubber tubing, gloves, buckets, gas cans, tape, clamps, aluminum foil, propane cylinders, hotplates, plastic storage containers, ice chests, measuring cups, towels, bed sheets, and laboratory beakers.

Drain cleaner when mixed with salt produces hydrogen gas for use in the final stage of methamphetamine production. The hydrogen chloride gas procedure (as well as other procedures used in the manufacture of methamphetamine) is extremely dangerous and may cause death or serious injury, not only to the individuals making the methamphetamine, but also to others who may be nearby.

Methamphetamine producers have been known to leave waste at the site, dump it into streams and rivers, spread it out over open fields, dump it into sewage systems, or

leave it in garbage bags for the local trash collector. Motel or hotel rooms may be used for the purpose of manufacturing methamphetamine, which may result in toxic fumes that expose other guests and the cleaning staff to health hazards. The chemical vapors produced during the manufacturing process permeate the walls and carpets, making the rooms uninhabitable. Cleaning up these sites requires specialized training and costs that can average into the thousands of dollars per site, in funds that come out of the already strained budgets of state and local agencies. Property owners also face the burden of clean-up costs.

METHODS

The Grand Jury interviewed employees of the Mendocino County Superior Court, the District Attorney's Office, the Sheriff's Department, the Correctional Department, the Major Crimes Task Force, the Probation Department, the Department of Social Services, the Mental Health Department, the Office of the Public Defender, and the Public Health Department. Also interviewed were employees of the Willits Police Department, the Fort Bragg Police Department, and the Ukiah Police Department. Also interviewed were employees of the Ford Street Project, Project Sanctuary, the Ukiah Community Center, the Ukiah Valley Medical Center, the Howard Memorial Hospital, public housing authorities, and local realtors.

FINDINGS

1. Methamphetamine is one of the most powerful and pernicious drugs, potentially addictive from the first use.
2. After methamphetamine use is stopped, severe withdrawal symptoms occur, including depression, anxiety, fatigue, paranoia, aggression, and an intense craving for the drug. Psychotic symptoms can persist for months or years after use has ceased.
3. Methamphetamine use can result in hyperactivity, disturbed sleep patterns, irritability, paranoia, aggressive behavior, shortness of breath, involuntary muscle movements, malnutrition, and severe depression with suicidal tendencies. Chronic users may develop sores on their bodies from scratching at "crank bugs," the term that describes the common delusion that bugs are crawling under the skin. Long-term use may lead to fatal kidney and lung disease, brain damage, liver damage, stroke, lowered resistance to illnesses, tooth decay, and permanent psychological problems such as drug-induced psychosis.
4. Methamphetamine use during pregnancy results in a higher risk of premature births, babies with low birth weight, cardiac blockages and other birth defects. The use of methamphetamine during pregnancy impacts the fetus by reducing blood flow or by a direct toxic effect on the developing brain.
5. Children who are exposed to methamphetamine via second-hand smoke can have detectable levels of methamphetamine in their urine.
6. Children who are legally removed from a methamphetamine environment cannot take with them their clothing and toys due to contamination.

7. Children of methamphetamine-using parents are raised in a highly traumatic environment and often subjected to physical and emotional neglect.
8. Many Child Protective Service and domestic violence cases in Mendocino County are directly related to the use of methamphetamine by a parent or family member.
9. Substance abuse programs in Mendocino County are provided by:
 - a. Mendocino County Alcohol and Other Drug Program (AODP)
 - b. the Ford Street Project
 - c. Narcotics Anonymous (NA)
 - d. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
10. The number of patients needing medical services rises significantly in Mendocino County emergency rooms when there is a rise in the purity of the methamphetamine available on the streets.
11. Efforts to secure funding for programs to combat methamphetamine use require considerable staff time, though the yield is generally a short-term grant for a long-term need.
12. Gangs are involved with methamphetamine manufacture and sales in Mendocino County; gang violence can also be attributed to methamphetamine.
13. Biker gangs are becoming more active in the distribution of methamphetamine.
14. Many individuals and departments funded by Mendocino County taxpayers are involved in the arrest, prosecution and incarceration of methamphetamine users. These include city police, the Sheriff's Department, the Major Crimes Task Force, judges, court staff, probation officers, District Attorney staff, and Public Defender staff.
15. Law enforcement personnel express frustration over the lack of meaningful consequences for those enrolled in the Proposition 36 program, which attempts to provide an alternative to confinement for drug abusers.
16. Many of the items required to produce methamphetamine are readily available at local grocery and hardware stores. Because many of the chemicals used to make methamphetamine are explosive, caustic and carcinogenic, they pose serious health hazards if mixed together or stored improperly.
17. With a cash outlay of less than one hundred dollars, a batch of methamphetamine can be manufactured (cooked) and sold on the streets for several thousand dollars.
18. For every pound of methamphetamine manufactured there are six pounds of toxic waste materials that must be disposed of.
19. Professionals who work to combat drug abuse in the County agree that the problem is intensified because there is in the County both a high level of tolerance for general drug use and a lack of awareness of the dangers of methamphetamine.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. The Board of Supervisors and City Councils from the four incorporated cities

cooperate in taking the lead in the war on methamphetamine in Mendocino County. (Findings 6, 8-16)

2. The Board of Supervisors and City Councils from the four incorporated cities increase controls on the sale of ingredients used in the manufacture of methamphetamine. (Finding 5)
3. the Board of Supervisors and City Councils establish a process to rigorously evaluate both the costs to and the impact on the County and the incorporated cities of the methamphetamine epidemic. (Findings 6, 8-16)
4. the Board of Supervisors and City Councils continue to aggressively pursue grant funding to address the methamphetamine problem in Mendocino County. (Findings 11-16)
5. the Board of Supervisor and City Councils allocate money from their general funds to address the methamphetamine problem. (Finding 11,14, 19)
6. the District Attorney examine the consequences of current sentencing practices for drug-related crimes. (Finding 15)
7. the Board of Supervisors and City Councils require departments and agencies to freely share information and statistics regarding methamphetamine in order to coordinate programs and maximize resources. (Findings 11-16)
8. education of the public be the primary weapon to counter the methamphetamine epidemic. The Grand Jury strongly urges that both the County and local communities use all their resources (including school programs, town hall meetings, and media) to further educate and engage the residents of Mendocino County in efforts to combat methamphetamine. (Findings 1, 3, 4, 6, 11, 12, 17, 18)
9. community members assist law enforcement in uncovering methamphetamine labs by reporting suspicious odors, trash, and unusual traffic flow in their neighborhoods, through neighborhood watch programs, homeowners associations, and other local action groups. (Findings 6, 18)
10. all government agencies and non-governmental organizations encourage and cooperate with citizens' methamphetamine suppression efforts. (Findings 1, 3, 4, 6, 11, 12, 17, 18)

COMMENTS

As long as there is widespread tolerance among the general public for dangerous drug use, the efforts of law enforcement and drug prevention agencies will be ineffective.

The complexities involved in establishing an effective medical marijuana policy further muddy these waters. The leaders in this County, both public and private, need to communicate clearly the realities of dangerous drug use.

The public needs also to recognize that the costs of methamphetamine use extend far beyond the immediate consequences to the individual user. That user may be a burden to the community for the rest of his or her life. The family, particularly the children, of that user is at risk for physical, financial and emotional damage for years to come.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (all findings and all recommendations)
Chief Executive Officer, Mendocino County (all findings and all recommendations)
City Council of Fort Bragg (all findings and all recommendations)
City Council of Point Arena (all findings and all recommendations)
City Council of Ukiah (all findings and all recommendations)
City Council of Willits (all findings and all recommendations)
District Attorney, Mendocino County (all findings and all recommendations)
Department of Human Services, Mendocino County (all findings and all recommendations)
Department of Social Services, Mendocino County (all findings and all recommendations)
Public Health Officer, Mendocino County (all findings and all recommendations)
Public Health Department, Mendocino County (all findings and all recommendations)
Mental Health Department, Mendocino County (all findings and all recommendations)
Chief Probation Officer, Mendocino County (all findings and all recommendations)
AODP, Mendocino County (all findings and all recommendations)
Sheriff, Mendocino County (all findings and all recommendations)
Willits Police Department (all findings and all recommendations)
Ukiah Police Department (all findings and all recommendations)
Fort Bragg Police Department (all findings and all recommendations)
Mendocino County Major Crimes Task Force (all findings and all recommendations)
Superintendent, Mendocino County Office of Education (all findings and all recommendations)

RESPONSE REQUESTED

Presiding Judge, Mendocino County Superior Court
Project Sanctuary
The Ford Street Project
Ukiah Community Center
Ukiah Valley Medical Center
Frank Howard Memorial Hospital

Sources:

Governor's Office of Emergency Services Law Enforcement and Victim Services Division
Mendocino County Mental Health Department report; "Health Problems Caused by Methamphetamine Use" (Beth Martinez, Director)
Mendocino County Therapeutic Courts report
2004/2005 Nevada County Grand Jury Report "What You Don't Know *Can* Hurt You, Methamphetamine In Nevada County"
2001/2002 Mendocino County Grand Jury Report "Marijuana and Methamphetamine Suppression Efforts in Mendocino County"
MSNBC TV Program - "Wasteland"
National Geographic TV Program - "MS13"
2005/2006 Mendocino County Final Budget