

What Are the Signs of a Meth Lab?

Meth Fact Sheet

What are signs of a meth lab?

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.

Labs are frequently abandoned, and the potentially explosive and very toxic chemicals are left behind. Chemicals may also be burned or dumped in woods or along roads.

What does a meth lab smell like? Strong chemical odors such as ether, ammonia (smells like cat urine) and acetone (smells like nail polish)

The most common chemicals used to start the meth-making process are over-the-counter cold and asthma medications which contain ephedrine or pseudoephedrine as decongestants or stimulants.

Here are signs of a meth lab:

- Unusual strong chemical odors such as ether, ammonia (smell similar to cat urine) and acetone (smells similar to fingernail polish)
- Excess amounts of cold medicines containing Ephedrine or pseudoephedrine
- Empty pill bottles or blister packs
- Propane/Freon tanks with blue corrosion on fittings or spray-painted or burned, with bent or tampered valves
- Starting fluid cans opened from the bottom
- Heating sources such as hotplates/torches
- Excess coffee filters
- Excess baggies
- Excess matches
- Excess lithium batteries
- Cookware (Corning type) with white residue

- Glassware, mason jars or other glass containers
- Plastic tubing
- Funnels
- Hoses leading outside for ventilation
- Soft drink bottles with hoses running from them
- Drain cleaner, paint thinner, toluene, denatured alcohol, ammonia, acid, starter fluid, antifreeze, hydrogen peroxide, rock salt/iodine
- Lantern or camp stove fuel
- Iodine- or chemical-stained bathrooms or kitchen fixtures
- Evidence of chemical waste or dumping
- Excessive amounts of trash, particularly chemical containers, coffee filters with red stains, duct tape rolls. Empty cans of or paint thinner or pieces of red-stained cloth around the property
- Secretive or unfriendly occupants
- Extensive security measures or attempts to ensure privacy such as “No Trespassing” or “Beware of Dog” signs, fences, and large trees or shrubs
- Curtains always drawn or windows blackened or covered with aluminum foil on residences, garages, sheds, or other structures
- Increased activity, especially at night
- Frequent visitors, particularly at unusual times
- Renters who pay their landlords in cash

*** If you suspect a dwelling or property may be an illegal lab, contact your local police, or sheriff's department. If it's an emergency, call 911. Do not enter a site that you think may have been used for cooking meth. Meth labs present extreme dangers from explosions and exposure to hazardous chemicals.

Find out possible health problems of living near an illegal lab. Read the **WHAT ARE THE RISKS IF I LIVE NEAR A METH LAB?** fact sheet