

BROOME COUNTY FIREFIGHTERS' ASSOCIATION

BROOME COUNTY, NEW YORK

“Shake n’ Bake” Meth Hazard

The production and use of methamphetamine (meth) across the U. S. Continues to present challenges to emergency services responders. Meth is easy to make, highly addictive and its production and use may have serious impacts on both human health and environment. These realities warrant vigilance by emergency personnel not only because of the destructive nature of meth itself, but also due to the significant environmental hazard meth labs generate.

The U. S. Department of Justice indicates that thousands of independent meth labs operate across the nation. These labs require no specialized equipment or knowledge and can be found in any geographic area or setting. In the past year, the “shake and bake” method of producing a small batch of meth has become popular. This new process uses an easier, cheaper and faster way to produce methamphetamine. MSNBC has reported that several states have linked dozens of flash fires this year- some of them fatal - to meth manufacturing.

This new method involves a two liter soda bottle or Coleman fuel can, crushed pseudoephedrine pills, and some household chemicals. The ingredients are placed in a single container and shaken, resulting in a crystalline form of meth. However, if not handled correctly, this technique can produce powerful explosions. THE EMR-ISAC (Emergency Management and Response Information Sharing and Analysis Center) reports that addicts are increasingly using their vehicles as mobile labs.

Using the new formula, batches of meth are much smaller, but just as dangerous. It can produce a powerful explosion, touch off intense fires, and release drug ingredients that must be handled as toxic waste. If there is any oxygen at all in the bottle, it has a propensity to make a giant fireball. Unscrewing the bottle cap too fast can possibly result in a huge blast. A batch of meth can be made in just 30 minutes while traveling in vehicles and waste components can be disposed of along the roadside with many of the discarded items contaminated with residual chemicals that can be toxic, explosive or flammable.

Consequently, a routine traffic stop or accident with injuries can quickly escalate into a Haz Mat incident. Therefore, first responders must exercise caution when approaching an individual passed out in a car, a vehicle during a traffic stop, or at the scene of an accident it is prudent to consider these events potential haz mat situations.

Since the toxicity of the chemicals may have contaminated the area surrounding a meth lab, responding personnel should follow their department’s operating procedures and personal protective equipment guidelines if the presence of meth is suspected.