



Leave meth clean up to the professionals

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Cleaning up after a meth lab is a dangerous business and something amateurs shouldn't try, local experts say.

"I can't urge people enough not to attempt to clean up after a meth lab themselves," said Joe Martin, the Jacksonville branch manager of Paul Davis Restoration and Remodeling.

The danger was underscored Friday when a deputy with the Craven County Sheriff's Department was hospitalized following a Havelock meth bust.

Four Havelock police officers and four Craven deputies were at a doublewide trailer on U.S. 70 when they heard glass breaking in a garage several feet from the home.

Three suspects and eight deputies were taken to Craven Regional Medical Center for treatment. All were treated and released except Deputy Chris Drake, who was hospitalized after being overcome with fumes.

Martin has supervised the clean up of meth labs at homes after explosions and in hotel rooms after a police bust.

He said the chemicals in methamphetamines linger long after a normal cleaning.

"If hotel rooms use shared ventilation systems then the gases used in cooking meth can spread to other parts of the hotel," he said.

Martin said hotel owners who have had meth labs set up in their rooms should contact an industrial hygienist to find out the extent of the damage.

Meth is usually cooked in a kitchen area or at least in an area with a sink because the process requires a lot of water and somewhere to dump waste. As the chemicals are being mixed there is the potential for backsplash, which could run down behind the sink and soak drywall.

To completely clean after meth has been cooked in a kitchen or similar area, the sink, the pipes, the drywall and maybe more should be removed, Martin said.

The chemicals used in mixing meth can penetrate skin and severely damage lungs. Martin said his people would don water repellent haz-mat suits with duct tape around the ankles and wrists, rubber gloves and boots, full face shields and respirators before cleaning a contaminated area.

Meth labs are often busted because neighbors notice the strong chemical odor the mixing process produces, said Capt. Jon Lewis, supervisor of the Onslow County Sheriff's Department's narcotics division.

Mixing meth is very dangerous as the ingredients involved are very volatile and highly flammable. Certain chemicals used in the creation of the drug soak up water and when breathed into the lungs actually draws fluids out of your body into your lungs, Lewis said.

Despite labs being more easily discovered and the inherent dangers involved in making meth, the meth lab phenomenon is growing, Lewis said.

Most people cooking meth are addicted to it themselves, he said. Unlike drugs like heroine and cocaine where high-level suppliers do not use their product, meth addicts are cooking for themselves and to make enough to live on.

On more than one occasion, authorities in Onslow County have raided a home where meth was sold and had addicts approach deputies about buying meth while they were dismantling the lab.

Lewis described the homes where meth labs are hidden as "dirty" and meth addicts themselves as "out to get their next hit."

Contact crime reporter Liddell Kay at 910-219-8456. Read Lindell's blog at <http://onslowcrime.enblogs.com>.