

Ohio fourth in seized meth labs in 2013

METRICH sees upswing and blames 'one-pot' cooking method

A faster way of making methamphetamine is leading to more meth labs, police say.

Ohio ranked fourth in the country in 2013 as authorities uncovered 1,010 labs, chemicals and glassware used in the drug's cooking process. Indiana was first, followed by Tennessee and Missouri.

"It's because of the one-pot cook," Mansfield police Deputy Chief Keith Porch said.

In the relatively new way of making meth, cooks combine anhydrous ammonia, pseudoephedrine tablets, water and lithium into one container at the beginning of the process.

"The cooks can be done within an hour," METRICH Detective Perry Wheeler said.

The cooks also are extremely dangerous. If the pot or bottle is shaken the wrong way, if oxygen gets inside or if the cap is loosened too quickly, it can explode into a giant fireball.

The state report was done by the Missouri Highway Patrol, based on numbers from the National Clandestine Laboratory Seizure System, a database run by the U.S. Department of Justice.

In 2012, Ohio was seventh in the rankings.

The Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation tracks meth seizures by federal fiscal year. The state's police report voluntarily, so there are likely more than the statistics reflect.

"Anytime we encounter a meth lab, we have to forward a report to BCI," Wheeler said.

Last year, authorities seized two meth labs in Richland County and 12 in the 10-county METRICH region. There were six reported meth labs in Richland County in 2012.

Already this year, METRICH has confiscated three meth labs in Richland County.

"We've been getting calls on meth labs weekly," Wheeler said.

Wheeler said Summit County in northeast Ohio led the state in meth labs in 2012.

The METRICH detective said another reason for the increase in meth labs is the ease with which cookers can obtain the chemicals. While pseudoephedrine is no longer available over the counter, cookers are paying people with a driver's license to buy the medicine.

Heroin is still the biggest problem drug in the area, but meth appeals to many people, too.

"It's fast to make. It's cheap and your high last numerous hours to days," Wheeler said. "With heroin, your high only lasts so long, then you need more heroin."

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