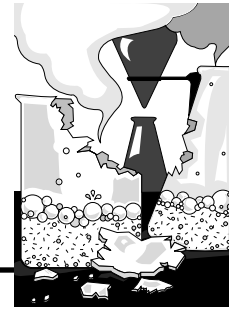


Clandestine Drug Labs

Crime and Violence Prevention Center • California Attorney General's Office



What Is A Clandestine Drug Laboratory?

The clandestine drug laboratory or *clan lab* is a mini-chemical lab designed for one purpose: to make deadly, illegal drugs quickly and cheaply.

Clan lab chemists can produce LSD, synthetic heroin and other drugs, but their drug of choice is methamphetamine, commonly called *speed* or *crank*. A smokeable form of methamphetamine called *ice*, *glass* or *crystal* is also produced.

These homemade drugs are dangerous, but the labs are equally dangerous and can be located in any neighborhood. Toxic chemicals, explosions, fires, booby traps, armed criminals – any of these can mean disaster for the people who inadvertently stumble onto the labs.

If You Spot A Clan Lab

LEAVE THE AREA AT ONCE. Anyone without proper training and protective gear should stay at least 500 feet away from any suspected clandestine laboratory.

IMMEDIATELY CONTACT your police or sheriff to notify them of your suspicions. *CALL 911 if you think you've been exposed to toxic chemicals.*

DON'T INVESTIGATE because of the danger to you and anyone else in the area. Most law enforcement agencies have narcotics teams. Busting clan labs is their job, let them do it.

Why Clan Labs Are Dangerous

Explosion and fire are probably the most common hazards. Usually the lab has a mixture of volatile chemicals, such as ether, that is carelessly handled by a criminal-chemist who works in a poorly ventilated room.

These high concentrations of toxic fumes and explosive chemicals create a dangerous situation. Actions such as knocking over a container, having a lit cigarette, or switching on electrical equipment that makes a spark is enough to cause an explosion.

Contact with the chemicals is extremely hazardous. Whether in their raw form or after they've been "cooked" into finished drugs, touching these chemicals or just breathing their fumes can cause fainting, sickness or permanent injury. Some law enforcement officers have suffered serious injuries such as a collapsed lung, pneumonia and chemical bronchitis from exposure to fumes.

Unfortunately, victims don't always realize that they have been exposed because the symptoms may not surface for many days or weeks.

How To Detect A Clan Lab

In both rural or urban areas, anyone can unexpectedly come across a clandestine laboratory.

Signs of a possible lab include:

- Strong or unusual chemical odors.
- Laboratory equipment (glass tubes, beakers, bunsen burners, funnels).
- Fortifications on houses or outbuildings, such as heavily barred windows or doors, etc.
- Chemical cans or drums in the front or back yard (these containers often have the labels marked or painted over).
- Automobile or foot traffic at all hours.
- People going outside the building only long enough to smoke, especially at motels or during bad weather.
- New high fences with no visible livestock or animals.

Where Clan Labs Are Located

Clan labs are usually found in:

- Rural rentals with absentee landlords (homes, barns, mobile homes or outbuildings).
- Urban home or apartment rentals with absentee landlords.
- Trailers and motor homes.
- Motel rooms.
- Houseboats.
- Mini-storage units. These are used to store chemicals, drugs, lab equipment and weapons.

How Clan Labs Are Transported

Clan labs are usually portable and can be quickly disassembled and moved to a new location.

Be alert. “Cookers” or criminal-chemists move labs frequently to escape detection, using free-ways as well as rural and urban roads.

Any type of size of vehicle may be used for transport. This includes pick-up trucks, motor homes, cars and tractor-trailer rigs.

Be aware. A vehicle carrying chemicals can be just as explosive and toxic as a working lab. Drug cookers are often in a hurry and very careless when they load up chemicals and lab equipment.

Be careful. If you stop at an accident scene or are looking at an abandoned vehicle, unusual chemical odors or visible laboratory type equipment may be the only warning you get.

Be suspicious. Discarded chemicals and equipment are hazardous. Cookers often dump toxic waste or lab equipment anywhere. They don’t care about the extreme danger and hazards to people, property or the environment.

How Clan Labs Are Booby-Trapped

Booby traps are used by the cookers for warning and protection. These traps can be triggered by any normal movement, such as opening a door or flipping on a switch. Unfortunately, any unsuspecting person who stumbles onto a clan lab site can lose an arm, a leg or a life.

Common booby traps include:

- Trip wires designed to set off alarms, explosive or toxic chemical devices.
- Hidden pungee sticks. These are buried wooden planks with large nails or spikes protruding upward.
- Light switches, refrigerators, VCRs or other electrical appliances wired to explosive devices.

How You Can Help

Know what to look for, and be alert. Your knowledge and quick action can help close down a lab and prevent serious injury or death to yourself and others. But remember, clan labs are toxic time bombs, frequently booby-trapped, and often have heavily armed persons inside or nearby.

Don't investigate – call the police or sheriff.

To order copies of the video
Clandestine Drug Labs ... Kitchens of Death
call 1-800-982-1420

This brochure was produced
in conjunction with the
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