

Farm Safety Tip – Methamphetamine is a Farm Safety Issue

At an SAIF agricultural safety seminar last month a major focus was on the methamphetamine (meth) epidemic. At first glance the topic might seem out of place for an ag safety seminar. Yet when looking further the connection becomes clear.

First, meth use can affect a worker's ability to perform tasks safely. There are more meth addicts in the nation than there are cocaine and heroin addicts combined. Evidence suggests Oregon has the highest meth addiction per capita in the nation. This is a serious issue that cuts across all occupations.

Second, chemicals and waste materials from meth labs can cause considerable harm to people. Many labs are located in isolated or abandoned farm buildings, dwellings, and old trailers.

Third, anhydrous ammonia (a critical component in the manufacture of meth) can be extremely dangerous when not handled properly. It can cause serious injuries from chemical burns to the body and lungs. Anhydrous ammonia theft from farms is commonplace in Oregon. During a theft, thieves often tamper with tank flow valves. This can go unnoticed until workers are surprised by leaks or sprays of the ammonia.

Here are some tips on preventing and dealing with hazards from methamphetamine use and production:

#1 Educate workers on the risks and dangers of meth. Inform them that it is more addictive than heroin or cocaine, it really does destroy lives, and only 20% of those who become addicted have been able to break the addiction.

#2 Monitor all areas of your property including remote and abandoned buildings. Make sure sheds, barns and other structures have proper locks and security systems.

#3 Participate in a Farm Watch system or a “good neighbor” policy with people and operations around you. Keep an eye out for signs of meth activity: Lots of paper boxes and packaging from cold tablets, hot plates or electric skillets, coffee filters soaked in alcohol or ether, laboratory glassware, plastic tubing, plastic bags, batteries, used syringes, strong chemical smells.

#4 If you discover an area where a meth lab is or may have been in operation, or a possible dump site, DO NOT ENTER. Discarded containers can be highly volatile. Residues can be highly toxic. Call law enforcement officers first.

#5 Ensure that anhydrous ammonia tanks are placed in lighted, secure areas.

#6 Consider purchase or rental of locking devices for anhydrous ammonia nurse tank valves when you obtain your nurse tank.

#7 Watch for signs of anhydrous ammonia theft. Check tank valves regularly. Place brightly colored plastic wire ties or seals between the valve wheel and the roll cage to facilitate quick visual checks. Keep an eye out for signs of activity near the tank such as footprints, wet soil, duct tape, garden hoses, plastic tubing, or bicycle inner tubes.

Here are three websites you can use to educate and inform yourself and your workers about the health risks and dangers associated with methamphetamine use:

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/methamphetamine.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/meth/> , and

<http://www.oregonlive.com/special/oregonian/meth/>

For more information on the hazards associated with meth labs, see

<http://www.cfbf.com/programs/agcrime/meth.cfm>

For more information on preventing anhydrous ammonia theft, see

<http://ohioline.osu.edu/aex-fact/0594-1.html>

