

INJURY UPDATE

A Report to Oklahoma Injury Surveillance Participants*

October 22, 2004

Methamphetamine Laboratory-Related Fire and Burn Injuries in Oklahoma, 1988-2002

Due to the accessibility of the items needed to produce methamphetamines (meth), it has become the drug of choice to produce, consume and transport in the state of Oklahoma. The number of meth lab seizures by law enforcement officials in the state has been increasing since 1995. Because of the menagerie of chemicals used in the production of meth, there is a risk to first responders, law enforcement officials and citizens. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, there were 894 meth labs seized in Oklahoma in 2003, more than twice as many as in 1999 (404). More than \$800,000 of federal, state and local money was spent on cleaning up illegal drug labs in the state of Oklahoma in 2002.

In November 1986, the Oklahoma State Department of Health made burn/smoke inhalation injuries that resulted in hospitalization or death a reportable condition. Collection of such information began in September 1987 and has continued since. This report examines burn/smoke inhalation injuries related to meth labs in the state of Oklahoma. Due to the illegal nature of how these injuries are acquired, meth lab-related burn injuries are likely underreported.

From 1988 to 2002, 7,234 Oklahomans were hospitalized in a burn center or died from a burn or smoke inhalation injury. Of these, 40 were related to a meth laboratory. Fifteen percent of persons injured in a meth lab died (6/40) and half of the injuries occurred in conjunction with a house fire. The average age of injured persons was 33 (range 19-49) (Figure 1). Males accounted for 78% (31/40) of the injuries with a rate that was over three times that of females (0.13 and 0.04 per 100,000 population, respectively). African Americans had the highest average annual injury rate (0.35 per 100,000 population) followed by whites and Native Americans (0.08 and 0.07 per 100,000 population, respectively).

Figure 1: Meth Lab-Related Injury Rates by Age Group and Sex, Oklahoma, 1988-2002

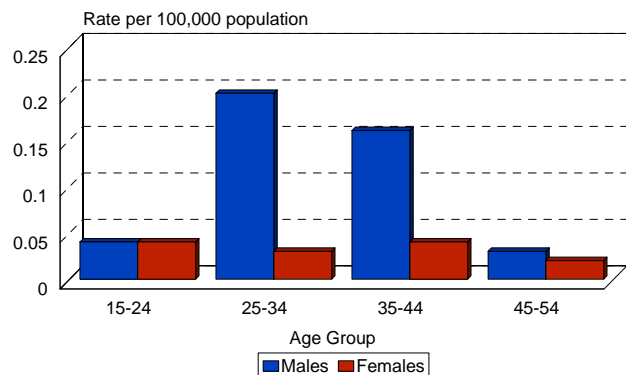
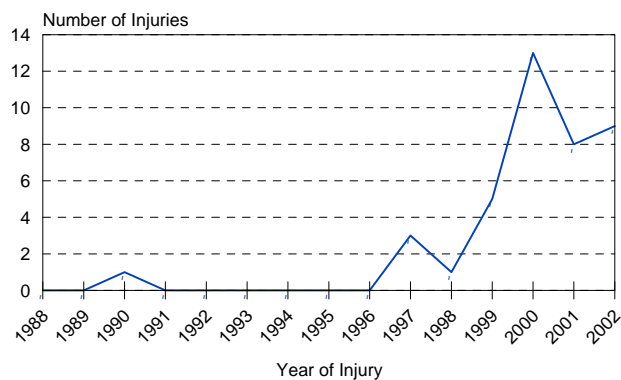


Figure 2: Number of Meth Lab-Related Burn Injuries by Year, Oklahoma, 1988-2002



*The INJURY UPDATE is a report produced by the Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. Other issues of the INJURY UPDATE may be obtained from the Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health, 1000 N.E. 10th Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73117-1299, 405/271-3430 or 1-800-522-0204 (in Oklahoma). INJURY UPDATES and other IPS information is also available at www.health.state.ok.us/program/injury.

PREVENTION

Since the number of illegal drug labs are on the rise, citizens should be aware of the signs for meth labs and exposure to keep from sustaining a contact or inhalation injury from contaminated persons or items. Persons operating meth labs will often install “booby traps” for early warning and security purposes around their facility. Traps can range from mechanical and electrical devices to explosives. If a meth lab is suspected, contact law enforcement officials immediately and do not enter the site.

Warning signs of illegal meth labs:



Strong odor of solvents or chemicals (like paint, ether, ammonia, alcohol or acetone)



Blacked out windows in homes, apartments, or motor vehicles



Iodine- or chemical- stained bathroom or kitchen fixtures or countertops, clothing, or skin



Renters that pay in cash



Increased activity or frequent visitors, especially at night



Excessive trash, especially unusual amounts of glass containers, jars or cookware, antifreeze containers, fuel cans, and batteries



Extensive security, such as anti-personnel devices (injurious security systems), booby traps, and guard dogs

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