

VILLAGE LIFE

EL DORADO HILLS

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June 7 - 13, 2006

Methamphetamine: A history of use and abuse

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Editor's note: This is part one of a four-part series examining the methamphetamine epidemic.

Kitty litter, sulfuric acid, brake cleaner, acetone, red phosphorus, lye, hydrochloric acid, fertilizer ...

With such a list of substances, you might think someone was looking for the right combination to remove that oil stain from the driveway. Or, heaven forbid, perhaps someone was planning to build one of those "dirty bombs."

Actually, these chemicals are

just part of the list of agents used to produce illegal methamphetamine, a drug that has seen its popularity grow exponentially over the last 15 years despite extremely detrimental health effects.

Last month a top U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration official announced at an international conference in Montreal that "more people use methamphetamine worldwide than users of heroin and cocaine combined." Unfortunately, the United States – and specifically California – is at the root of the "meth" epidemic.

El Dorado County Superior

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Photo courtesy of EDC Sheriff – Narcotics

TYPICAL PARAPHERNALIA of an addict that smokes methamphetamine –the glass pipe.

Court Judge Eddie Keller has sat on the bench for 17 years and watched methamphetamine become a countywide problem.

"It's getting to be the most common drug of abuse by far. We don't see much cocaine or heroin," he said. "It's meth that's really the evil here."

Judge Keller isn't the only EDC official that has watched methamphetamine become a strain on public health and safety.

District Attorney Gary Lacy has been in office since 1994, and has prosecuted criminals in the county since the late 80s.

"I think when meth first came on our radar screen it wasn't recognized for the devastating effects it has on individuals," he said.

History

Though methamphetamine, or "meth" as it is common-

ly referred to, has really taken center stage in the war on drugs over the last couple of decades, its beginnings go back to the late 19th Century. First discovered as amphetamine by a German chemist in 1887, it wasn't until the 1930s that it was commonly prescribed as cold medicine.

In 1935, the stimulant effects of amphetamine were discovered, and were used by physicians to treat narcolepsy.

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Photo courtesy of Mitchell Goodis, D.D.S.

METHAMPHETAMINE USERS users typically have severe dental problems within just a couple of years because of the toxic chemicals included in the drug.

