Meth: Not only dangerous for drug users

Ionia County Health Department Health Officer Ken Bowen said of the current 42 condemned dwellings in Ionia County, 21 are condemned because of methamphetamine contamination.

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IONIA COUNTY

Methamphetamine labs and use is extremely dangerous, and the Ionia County Health Department is reminding residents that simply living in a home where the drug has been produced or used in the past can also be hazardous to someone's health.

The problem is coming up more often as the drug has become widespread in recent years. Law enforcement and public officials said this is because it's cheap to produce, easy to make and highly addictive.

Issues in Ionia County

Ionia County Health Department Health Officer Ken Bowen said of the current 42 condemned dwellings in Ionia County, 21 are condemned because of methamphetamine contamination.

“Meth is made with a combination of what is basically poisonous chemicals,” Bowen said. “The residue found in homes is dangerous, especially for children.”

In 2004, the Michigan legislature created a re-occupancy guideline for former meth labs. According to the cleanup criteria, a wipe-sample test can find no more than 0.5 micrograms per 100 square centimeters in a home.

Bowen said the condemned houses in Ionia County are found in every corner of the county. According to the United States Drug Enforcement Agency, there are 16 structures in Ionia County since 2008 that have been listed on the National Clandestine Laboratory Register.

Of those 16, five were in Ionia, three were in Lyons, two were in Lake Odessa and there was one structure each in Portland, Saranac, Fenwick, Orleans, Muir and Hubbardston.

That list doesn't include every residence the health department has condemned. The reason those numbers are incomplete is not every house where meth levels are above the minimum standard are reported to the register, according to former DEA contractor and Operation Manager for the Meth Lab Cleanup Company Joe Mazzuca.

“There was failed funding in Congress — we don't have the real statistics,” Mazzuca said.

Based in northern Idaho, Meth Lab Cleanup has more than 60 multi-member teams specializing in cleaning meth labs across the country.

According to Mazzuca, the most popular way to produce meth in Michigan is the “shake-and-bake” approach which means mixing, among many other items, ingredients such as battery acid, drain cleaner and gasoline together in a pop bottle and afterwards drying it in a microwave.

He said some structures the company has tested have had residue levels up to and exceeding 300 micrograms per 100 square centimeters.

The chemical reaction is the main reason meth labs are highly explosive, and many people addicted to the drug suffer burns to their face and hands.

Another problem is that while there are many places where law enforcement has discovered the drug, there are additional places where drug is made or used that go undetected.

“The rule of thumb is law enforcement finds 1 in 10 meth labs,” Mazzuca said.