CLANDESTINE DRUG LABORATORIES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Jordan Diplock
Sheena Kirkland
Aili Malm
Darryl Plecas[1]

Centre for Criminal Justice Research (CCJR)
University College of the Fraser Valley

September 2005

[1] Authorship is alphabetical

Clandestine Drug Laboratories In British Columbia

Jordon Diplock, Sheena Kirkland, Aili Malm, Darryl Plecas

Executive Summary

This report describes the results of a study undertaken to find out more about synthetic drug production operations, specifically methamphetamine in British Columbia. The study sought to provide a picture of selected characteristics of clandestine synthetic drug labs discovered by police in recent years, giving particular attention to how these labs came to the attention of police and how, as cases, they were investigated, prosecuted, and sentenced. Further, the study sought to describe the nature of these labs and the characteristics of the offenders involved.

The methodology employed in the study was quite straightforward. Simply, it involved conducting file reviews of all cases of clandestine drug labs coming to the attention of police offices in British Columbia (including those of municipal police departments) for the two-year period April 01, 2003 to March 31, 2005. A listing of these cases was provided by RCMP "E" Division Headquarters and included 48 cases associated to 16 jurisdictions. Of these 48 cases, five could be described as dump sites for chemicals from clandestine labs, and four others were associated to locations where chemicals used in clandestine labs were being stored. Further, another six cases were delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) extraction labs, and while these were reviewed, they were excluded from the analysis for this report. Accordingly, the description and analysis provided in this report is based on 33 cases.

The file reviews revealed that the 33 clandestine labs discovered by police over the study period were located across 15 jurisdictions around the province - ten of those jurisdictions are in the province's Lower Mainland and this is where the majority of labs have been discovered. Of these 33 laboratories, essentially half were "operational" – that is, at the time of discovery, they were in the process of "cooking" (synthesis or blending chemical ingredients). Another 10 laboratories were "non-operational" – that is, at the time of their discovery by police, they were "not cooking" but were either set up to cook or it was evident a "cook" had just taken place and the lab was still assembled. The remaining seven labs could be described as "boxed labs" – that is, labs that were in a dismantled state for storage, shipment, or hiding. Five of the non-operational and boxed labs were in transport at the time of their discovery, and overall 29 (i.e. 88%) of the 33 labs discovered were, or had the potential to be, producing drugs at the time of their seizure.

In terms of what these labs were set up to manufacture, 27 were methamphetamine labs, and of these, seven were set up to produce ecstasy that contained methamphetamine as the primary drug. The remaining five labs were set up to manufacture other varieties of ecstasy, including one lab that produced the so-called "date rape" drug GHB.

On the matter of how these incidents came to the attention of the police, the study found that 23% came to their attention as a result of proactive police

investigation. Rather, the vast majority came to the attention of police through a variety of means (e.g. Crime Stoppers, landlords, fire departments, traffic stops, other crimes, and referrals from inspectors, storage locker owners, etc.). Consistent with the fact that the discovery of drug labs is generally not the result of proactive police investigation is file information that revealed that two-thirds of discovered labs were responded to on the same day that they came to the attention of the police.

In terms of the characteristics of discovered labs, the reviews revealed first, that about half of the labs were set up in houses, and another two were set up in apartments. Further, all but two of those residences were rental properties. Other discoveries were made in detached buildings, and in the case of boxed labs, in vehicles. In terms of commercial properties, two were located in storage lockers and one lab was located in a warehouse.

The production capabilities of discovered labs ranged from 50 grams to more than five kilograms – those with a capacity to produce more than five kilograms in a single synthesis often being referred to as "superlabs". And as it turns out, more than half of both operational and non-operational labs would fit into this "superlab" category.

Notably, but not surprisingly, the level of sophistication apparent with discovered labs appeared to be associated with their production capacity. In 16% of cases, the lab equipment was handmade, and in another 22% of cases the equipment used was a mix of both handmade and professional items. In the remaining 62% of cases, the equipment used had been professionally manufactured.

The police files also provided information about what chemicals were seized at discovered labs, although police themselves caution that this information is not necessarily accurate because empty chemical containers were not always listed, and they could not otherwise always confirm the exact nature of chemicals seized. Still, it is apparent from the broad range of chemicals seized that the final product of labs can be (and is) produced through several different combinations of precursors, reagents, and solvents. Indeed, the flexible nature of recipes that go with producing synthetic drugs allows for the use of many different forms of precursors, reagents, and solvents to be used in production. There are precursor chemicals such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine that are necessary components in drug synthesis, but even then they would not necessarily be identifiable on site at labs because of the fact that drug synthesis occurs in many stages and these chemicals may not be present in pure form. In this regard, it is noteworthy while ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are necessary precursors, among the labs associated to this study; those chemicals were rarely seized.

It is well recognized that clandestine labs pose a multiplicity of dangers to anyone who is around them. Many of the chemicals used are dangerous for one reason or another on their own, but they become even more dangerous once manipulated by amateur chemists working in what are essentially makeshift laboratories (without proper ventilation, temperature controls, and other safeguards). The review of files revealed, for example, that in the case of operational and non-operational labs, leaky containers were present 33% of the time, and burn hazards were present 64% of the time. Not surprisingly, fire

was involved in 33% of labs deemed to be operational.

Beyond the risk of fire and explosion, there are also the environmental hazards that go with clandestine labs and the inevitable improper disposal of chemicals and equipment. These hazards are well known, and it is becoming increasingly apparent that the associated clean up is extremely expensive – so expensive in fact that it is conceivable that some landlords (rather than report evidence of a lab) might be motivated to remove evidence from their own property to a dump site so that cleanup costs are forced on others.

Another hazard that can be associated to clandestine labs is the presence of weapons. In this regard, the review revealed that firearms were present at 31% of operational and non-operational labs, and other weapons (e.g. knives) were present 23% of the time.

Suspects were identified in 70% (i.e.23) of the 33 synthetic drug labs considered, and as it turns out, their characteristics are remarkably similar to those of offenders associated to marihuana grow operations in British Columbia. Specifically, the vast majority (87%) is male, the average age is 33, nearly all (96%) are adults, and 71% are Caucasian. The only notable differences between identified suspects associated to synthetic drug labs and marihuana grow operators is with respect to criminal history. Synthetic drug lab operators are far more recidivistic. Specifically, while marihuana grow operators with criminal histories were found to have committed an average of seven convictions over their average 13-year criminal histories, synthetic drug lab suspects were found to have an average of 13 convictions each over their 14-year criminal histories.

In terms of action taken with respect to the 23 labs where suspects were present, just 13 (i.e. 57%) involved charges being laid. The suspects involved were charged under Section 7 of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (CDSA), and in the case of five labs, they were also charged under Section 5 of the CDSA. However, as of the time of writing, charges have been dealt with in only four cases. In one of those four cases, charges were stayed, and in the other three, the suspects involved plead guilty. One suspect received a five-year prison term, one received an 18-month conditional sentence, and another received a 12-month condition sentence and a $1750 fine.

In conclusion, while the small number of cases reviewed by this study makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the nature and extent of clandestine laboratories in British Columbia, the indications are clear that most of the labs that have been discovered recently in the province had a capacity to produce a significant amount of methamphetamine. Further, it is clear that those labs were generally of a makeshift nature and used dangerous chemicals in ways that posed a number of inherent hazards to the health and public safety of communities.

Perhaps the most disturbing finding of the study is the small number of labs uncovered over the period studied, relative to the hundreds of labs discovered annually in jurisdictions across the United States (U.S.). This is disturbing because we know that the level of reported use by high school students in British Columbia appears to be at least twice as high as it is, on average, in the U.S. It suggests that those labs that have been discovered are probably just a fraction of the numbers that really exist.

In any case, it is fair to say that our lack of information about the nature and extent of labs in the province need not hold us back from moving to develop strategies to combat them. A national evaluation in the U.S. found, for example, that simply educating police officers, utility workers, and the community in general about the precursors used in clandestine labs leads to increases in lab discoveries (i.e. McEwen et al., 2003). There have also been notable examples of apparent success in combating labs where jurisdictions have implemented pharmacy rules to control the availability of and access to products that contain precursors (i.e. Oklahoma and Oregon as reported by the Oregon State Police and Oregon Narcotics Enforcement Association, 2005). At the same time, it is very clear that the federal government and provincial/territorial governments across Canada are already actively working on strategies to deal with the problem of clandestine labs. This was obvious from the June 2005 meeting of the Western Ministers of Health, Justice, and Public Safety, where discussions focused on developing responses to the problem of methamphetamines and particularly obvious from their calls for expanded legislation and controls to restrict access to precursors, a greater commitment to the enforcement of precursor controls, increased public education, and harsher penalties for those involved in the production and distribution of methamphetamine. The Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada has established a national working group to assist in developing a national strategic approach to the problems related to methamphetamine and other illicit substances. Further, the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General in British Columbia has designated a senior civil servant to focus specifically on developing a response strategy for the province.

Equally encouraging, there is a wealth of information now available about how other jurisdictions are working to handle concerns related to methamphetamine. In fact, one outstanding starting place to develop a sense of how individual communities might respond to the problem, is the U.S. government's new website at www.methresources.gov. This site is essentially a comprehensive clearinghouse for information on all aspects related to methamphetamine. Visitors to the site can learn of what various jurisdictions are doing in terms of enforcement, legislative changes, pharmacy rules, meth watch programs, treatment programs, and other response mechanisms and collaborative strategies. At the same time they can be directed to those jurisdictions that have seen dramatic introductions in both methamphetamine labs and methamphetamine use. Importantly, the site also provides links to other very informative sites addressing other drugs of concern and associated issues.

One of the matters that becomes very apparent upon visiting the website is that the picture provided regarding the response to the problem of methamphetamine production and use in the U.S. is helped enormously by the data monitoring and tracking systems in place. Indeed, this makes it relatively easy to obtain a quick snapshot of what works and what does not appear to work across a broad range of jurisdictions. In the final analysis, to enhance and support an effective response Canada requires a similar drug resource website, and a similar annual tracking system in place, to facilitate the provision of multi-jurisdictional analysis and helpful cross - comparisons of intervention strategies.

Introduction

In recent years, law enforcement officials, fire officials, drug treatment specialists, victims, broadcasters, elected officials, and other concerned British Columbians have been calling attention to what appears to be a significant prevalence of methamphetamine use (particularly among young people) in British Columbia. Recent statistics on drug use in high schools would support this expressed concern. For example, a recent Institute for Safe Schools for British Columbia survey of 13,176 high school students from three separate school districts in the province suggests that at least eight percent of high school students used "crystal meth" during the 2004/05 school year (Dow and Waterhouse, 2005). Further, almost all of theses students report having used the drug on school property during the school year, and virtually half of them report using on school property more than once per week (Dow and Waterhouse, 2005). As well, it should be noted that there is an unknown percentage of high school students who have used ecstasy in the last year without knowing that it was likely adulterated with methamphetamine (see for example, Peel et al, 2001; Health Canada, 2004). In any case, the level of admitted use among high school students in British Columbia, as suggested through the Institute for Safe Schools for British Columbia survey, would appear to be higher than the level of use reported by high school students elsewhere in Canada (see for example the report of Nordeste, 2004) and in the United States. In this regard, for instance, the University of Michigan's *Monitoring the Future* Study suggests that less than five percent of high school students in the United States have used methamphetamine in the last year (i.e. between 1999 and 2002), and overall the rate of use has actually been declining across grades (as reported in the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Fact Sheet, November 2003). Beyond the incident of use by high school students in British Columbia, the experiences of police interviewed for this report would suggest that alarming numbers of offenders are found to be high on methamphetamine at the time of their arrest.

In some respects the prevalence of methamphetamine is not surprising despite heightened public awareness of its characterization as a very dangerous drug. Firstly, as indicated by

the Institute for Safe Schools for British Columbia survey, a significant percentage of those who use methamphetamine tend to use it excessively. Secondly, and according to reports from police, methamphetamine is relatively inexpensive – a single "hit" can be purchased for as little a five dollars, and for as little as twenty dollars a day an addict with a direct connection to a manufacturer can comfortably support a habit.

The reason methamphetamine is so inexpensive is no doubt related primarily to the fact that it is relatively easy, quick and inexpensive to manufacture. In fact, judging by websites that provide recipes on how to "cook up" a batch of the drug, it would seem at first glance that even a lay chemist could pull together the required ingredients and be in production in their own kitchen in a matter of days. In a written submission to an April 2005 U.S. Senate hearing on methamphetamine abuse in the United States, the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors cited a report finding that as little as "$80.00 U.S. spent at a pharmacy and hardware store can buy ingredients to make an ounce of methamphetamine worth $1,000.00 U.S." (NASADAD, 2005). At the same time, it is clear from the highly sophisticated methamphetamine production operations discovered by police that it is possible to manufacture extremely high quantities of the drug at a single location in very short periods of time. According to the U.S. ONDCP Fact Sheet, it is possible to produce "in excess of ten pounds of methamphetamine in a 24-hour period, producing high-purity, low-cost methamphetamine" (. However, it is also clear that we have not had a clear picture of the nature and extent of methamphetamine production in British Columbia. On a national level, and using RCMP figures, we know that the number of methamphetamine labs discovered by the police has grown dramatically (i.e. from two in 1998 to 37 in 2003 as reported by Norteste, 2004), and we have had reports from police drawing attention to a similarly significant increase in British Columbia.

With the above in mind, this report describes the results of a study undertaken to find out more about synthetic drug production operations, specifically methamphetamine in British Columbia. The study sought to provide a picture of selected characteristics of clandestine drug production labs discovered by police in recent years, giving particular attention to how these labs came to the attention of police and how, as cases, they were

investigated, prosecuted, and sentenced. Further, the study sought to describe the nature of these labs and the characteristics of the offenders involved.

Methodology

The methodology employed in the study was quite straightforward. Simply, it involved conducting file reviews of all cases of clandestine drug labs coming to the attention of all police offices in British Columbia (including those of municipal police departments) for the two-year period April 01, 2003 to March 31, 2005. A listing of these cases was provided by RCMP "E" Division Headquarters and included 48 cases associated to 16 jurisdictions. Of these 48 cases however, five could be described as dump sites for chemicals from clandestine labs, and four others were associated to locations where chemicals used in clandestine labs were being stored. Further, another six cases were delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) extraction labs, and while these were reviewed, they were excluded from the analysis for this report. Accordingly, the description and analysis provided in this report is based on 33 cases.

In the vast majority of cases, the file reviews were completed through site visits to the police offices of the jurisdictions involved, and in the remainder of the cases (where distance and scheduling made timely site visits impractical) files were sent to and reviewed at RCMP "E" Division Headquarters. The site visits were particularly helpful because, more often than not, they provided the researchers with an opportunity to meet directly with frontline officers who had first-hand experience in clandestine drug lab investigations, and the files being studied.

The file reviews were guided by a coding sheet that sought information on 38 variables (see Appendix A). In addition, suspect information was collected using a 65-item coding sheet (Appendix B), and this was supplemented by the coding of suspects' criminal histories where there was a record of such through CPIC (Appendix C). This information, with all personal identifiers removed, was entered onto a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) database and merged with the incident data for analysis.

Incidents of Clandestine Synthetic Drug Labs

The file reviews revealed that the 33 clandestine labs discovered by police over the study period were located across 15 jurisdictions around the province. However, as Table 1 shows, ten of those jurisdictions are in the province's Lower Mainland and this is where the majority of labs (i.e. 24) have been discovered.

Table 1
Location of Clandestine Labs
Discovered by Police in British Columbia
Between April 2, 2003 and March 31, 2005

Jurisdiction	# of Labs Found
Surrey*	7
Vancouver*	4
Abbotsford*	3
Nanaimo	3
Ridge Meadows*	3
Sunshine Coast	2
Coquitlam*	2
Richmond*	2
Burnaby*	1
Coquihalla Hwy (toll booth)	1
Delta*	1
Langley*	1
Mission*	1
Powell River	1
Terrace	1
	1
B.C. Overall	33

*Lower Mainland Locations

Of these 33 actual laboratories, essentially half (i.e. 16) were "operational" – that is, at the time of discovery, they were in the process of "cooking" (synthesis or blending

chemical ingredients). Another 10 laboratories were "non-operational" – that is, at the time of their discovery by police, they were "not cooking" but were either set up to cook or it was evident a "cook" had just taken place and the lab was still assembled. The remaining seven labs could be described as "boxed labs" – that is, labs that were in a dismantled state for storage, shipment, or hiding. Five of the non-operational and boxed labs were in transport at the time of their discovery, and overall 29 (i.e. 88%) of the 33 labs discovered were, or had the potential to be, producing drugs at the time of their seizure.

In terms of what these labs were set up to manufacture, 27 were methamphetamine labs, and of these, seven were set up to produce ecstasy that contained methamphetamine as the primary drug. The remaining five labs were set up to manufacture other varieties of ecstasy, including one lab that produced the so-called "date rape" drug GHB.

On the matter of just how these incidents came to the attention of the police, it is interesting to note that just 23% came to their attention as a result of proactive police investigation. Rather, as Table 2 shows, the vast majority came to the attention of police through a variety of means (e.g. Crime Stoppers, landlords, fire departments, traffic stops, other crimes, and referrals from inspectors, storage locker owners, etc.).

Table 2
How Clandestine Labs Were Discovered
By Police in British Columbia
Between April 1, 2003 and March 31, 2005
Came to the Attention of Police

Source	%
General Investigation	23
Crime Stoppers	17
Landlords	13
Fire Service/Hazmat	13
Other Crime	10
Traffic Stop	7
Other (e.g. Neighbour)	17

Consistent with the fact that the discovery of drug labs is generally not the result of proactive police investigation is file information that revealed that two-thirds of discovered labs (i.e. 66%) were responded to on the same day that they came to the attention of the police.

Characteristics Of Clandestine Synthetic Drug Labs

In terms of the characteristics of discovered labs, the file reviews enabled the researchers to look at the type of facilities these labs were housed in, their production capacity, and their level of sophistication. In this regard, the reviews revealed first, that about half of the labs (i.e. 52%) were set up in houses, and another 6% were set up in apartments. Further, all but two of those residences were rental properties. Other discoveries were made in detached buildings (i.e. 15%), and in the case of boxed labs (i.e.15%), in vehicles. In terms of commercial properties, 6% were located in storage lockers and one lab (i.e.3%) was located in a warehouse.

The production capabilities of discovered labs ranged from 50 grams to more than five kilograms – those with a capacity to produce more than five kilograms in a single synthesis often being referred to as “superlabs”. As Table 3 shows, more than half of

both operational and non-operational labs would fit into this "superlab" category. Even one of the boxed labs could be described as being a superlab, although most are obviously smaller (presumably to facilitate their mobility).

Table 3
Production Capacity of Clandestine Labs
Discovered by Police in British Columbia
Between April 1, 2003 and March 31, 2005

Size	Operational	Non-Operational	Boxed
% less than 50 grams	0	0	0
% 50 - <250 grams	7	0	50
% 250 -<500 grams	13	10	33
% 500 grams – 1 kilogram	7	0	0
% 1 - <5 kilograms	13	30	0
% 5 Kilograms or more	60	60	17
Overall	100%	100%	100%

Notably, but not surprisingly, the level of sophistication apparent with discovered labs appeared to be associated with their production capacity. In 16% of cases the lab equipment was handmade, and in another 22% of cases the equipment used was a mix of both handmade and professional items. In the remaining 62% of cases, the equipment used had been professionally manufactured (see Table 4).

Table 4
Equipment Found at Clandestine Labs
Discovered by Police in British Columbia
Between April 1, 2003 and March 31, 2005

Type of Lab	*% Handmade*	*% Professional*	*% Mix of Both*
Operational	19	56	25
Non-operational	11	56	33
Boxed	14	86	0
Overall	16	62	22

The police files also provided information about what chemicals were seized at discovered labs, although police themselves caution that this information is not necessarily accurate because empty chemical containers were not always listed, and they could not otherwise always confirm the exact nature of chemicals seized. Still, it is apparent from the broad range of chemicals seized that the final product of labs can be (and is) produced through several different combinations of precursors, reagents, and solvents. Indeed, the flexible nature of recipes that go with producing synthetic drugs allows for the use of many different forms of precursors, reagents, and solvents to be used in production. There are precursor chemicals such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine that are necessary components in drug synthesis, but even then, they would not necessarily be identifiable on site at labs because of the fact that drug synthesis occurs in many stages and these chemicals may not be present in pure form. In this regard, it is noteworthy while ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are necessary precursors, among the labs associated to this study; those chemicals were rarely seized (see Table 5).

Table 5
Chemicals Seized at Clandestine Labs Discovered by Police in British Columbia Between April 2, 2003 and March 31, 2005

Chemical	% of Labs where chemical was present
Acetone	42%
Hydrocholoric Acid	40%
Red Phosphorous	38%
Toluene	31%
Sodium Hydroxide	19%
Sulfuric Acid	19%
Methyl Hydrate	17%
Hydriodic Acid	15%
Isopropyl Alcohol	15%
Camper Fuel	15%
Safrole	13%
Iodine	13%
Caustic Soda	13%
Methanol	8%
Formic Acid	8%
Ephedrine	8%
Pseudoephedrine	8%
Hydrogen Peroxide	8%
Ammonia Anhydrous	6%
Isosafrole	6%
MDP-2-P	6%
Sodium Bicarbonate	6%
Potassium Hydroxide	4%
White Phosphorous	4%
Naphtha	4%
Poly Stripper	4%
Butane	4%
Ammonium Chloride	2%
Mercuric Chloride	2%
Nitro ethane	2%
Formaldehyde	2%
Dimethylamine	2%
Butyl Alcohol	2%
Codeine	2%
Phenyl-2-Propanone	2%
Acetic Acid	2%
Magnesium Sulfate	2%
Tetrahydrofuran	2%
Ethanol	2%
Sodium Bisulfate	2%
Piperonal	2%
Degreaser	2%
Methylamine	2%

Hazards Associated To Seized labs

It is well recognized that clandestine labs pose a multiplicity of dangers to anyone who is around them. Many of the chemicals used are dangerous for one reason or another on their own, but they become even more dangerous once manipulated by amateur chemists working in what are essentially makeshift laboratories (without proper ventilation, temperature controls and other safeguards). The review of files revealed, for example, that in the case of operational and non-operational labs, leaky containers were present 33% of the time, and burn hazards were present 64% of the time. Not surprisingly, fire was involved in 33% of labs deemed to be operational.

Beyond the risk of fire and explosion, there are also the environmental hazards associated with clandestine labs and the inevitable improper disposal of chemicals and equipment. To quote again the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy:

> " The manufacture of methamphetamine has a severe impact on the environment. The production of one pound of methamphetamine releases poisonous gas into the atmosphere and creates 5 to 7 pounds of toxic waste. Many laboratory operators dump the toxic waste down household drains, in fields and yards, or on rural roads."
>
> (ONDCP Fact Sheet, November 2003)

These hazards are well known, and it is becoming increasingly apparent that the associated clean up is extremely expensive – so expensive in fact that it is conceivable that some landlords (rather than report evidence of a lab) might be motivated to remove evidence from their own property to a dump site so that cleanup costs are forced on others.

Another hazard that can be associated to clandestine labs is the presence of weapons. In this regard, the review revealed that firearms were present at 31% of operational and non-operational labs, and other weapons (e.g. knives) were present 23% of the time.

Suspects Involved

Suspects were identified in 70% (i.e.23) of the 33 synthetic drug labs considered, and as it turns out, their characteristics are remarkably similar to those of offenders associated to marihuana grow operations in British Columbia. Specifically, as Table 6 shows, the vast majority (87%) are male, the average age is 33, nearly all (96%) are adults, and 71% are Caucasian. The only notable differences between identified suspects associated to synthetic drug labs and marihuana grow operators is with respect to criminal history. On the one hand, as with marihuana grow operators, nearly half (47%) have at least one conviction. On the other hand, as can be seen from Table 7, synthetic drug lab operators are far more recidivistic. Specifically, while marihuana grow operators with criminal histories were found to have committed an average of seven convictions over their average 13-year criminal histories, synthetic drug lab suspects were found to have an average of 13 convictions each over their 14-year criminal histories.

Table 6
Selected Characteristics of Suspects Involved in Founded Illegal Synthetic Drug Production Operations in British Columbia
(Compared to marihuana grow operators in B.C.)

Characteristic Considered	Drug Lab Operators*	Marihuana Grow Operators**
Male suspects	87%	77%
Average age of suspects	33 years old	35 years old
Suspects under the age of 18	4%	2%
Suspects from any minority ethnic groups***	29%	31%
Suspects with prior criminal convictions	47%	47%

*N=33

**Figures taken from Plecas et al. (2005)

***23% of suspects were Asian, 4% were South Asian, and 2% were Aboriginal

Table 7

Criminal Histories of Suspects Involved in Founded Illegal Synthetic Drug Production Operations in British Columbia (compared to marihuana grow operators in B.C.)

Characteristics of Suspect's Criminal Record Considered	Drug Lab Operators*	Marihuana Grow Operators**
Average length of criminal history	14 years	13 years
Average number of prior convictions	13	7
Percentage with prior drug convictions	38%	57%
Percentage with prior production conviction	29%	27%
Percentage with a conviction for violence	48%	41%
Percentage with a conviction for non-compliance offences	33%	28%
Average number of jurisdictions in which suspects were convicted	3.3	2.3

*N=33

**Figures taken from Plecas et al. (2005)

Action Taken

In terms of action taken with respect to the 23 labs where suspects were present, just 13 (i.e. 57%) involved charges being laid. The suspects involved were charged under Section 7 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA), and in the case of five labs, they were also charged under Section 5 of the CDSA. However, as of the time of writing, charges have been dealt with in only four cases. In one of those four cases, charges were stayed, and in the other three, the suspects involved plead guilty. One suspect received a five-year prison term, one received an 18-month conditional sentence, and another received a 12-month condition sentence and a $1750 fine.

Summary and Recommendations

While the small number of cases reviewed by this study makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the nature and extent of clandestine laboratories in British Columbia, the indications are clear that most of the labs that have been discovered recently in the province had a capacity to produce a significant amount of methamphetamine. Further, it is clear that those labs were generally of a makeshift nature and used dangerous chemicals in ways that posed a number of inherent hazards to public safety. Not surprisingly, labs were, on average, operated by individuals with lengthy criminal histories.

Perhaps the most disturbing finding of the study is the small number of labs uncovered over the period studied, relative to the hundreds of labs discovered annually in jurisdictions across the United States. This is disturbing because we know that the level of reported use by high school students in British Columbia appears to be at least twice as high as it is, on average, in the U.S. It suggests that those labs that have been discovered are probably just a fraction of the numbers that really exist.

In any case, it is fair to say that our lack of information about the nature and extent of labs in the province need not hold us back from moving to develop strategies to combat them. A national evaluation in the U.S. found, for example, that simply educating police officers, utility workers, and the community in general about the precursor used in clandestine labs leads to increases in lab discoveries (McEwen et al., 2003). There have also been notable examples of apparent success in combating labs where jurisdictions have implemented pharmacy rules to control the availability of and access to precursors (i.e. Oklahoma and Oregon as reported by the Oregon State Police and Oregon Narcotics Enforcement Association, 2005). At the same time, it is very clear that the federal government and provincial/territorial governments across Canada are already actively working on strategies to deal with the problem of clandestine labs. This was obvious from the June 2005 meeting of the Western Ministers of Health, Justice, and Public Safety, where discussions focused on developing responses to the problem of methamphetamines and particularly obvious from their calls for expanded legislation and

controls to restrict access to precursors, a greater commitment to the enforcement of precursor controls, more public education, and harsher penalties for those involved in meth production and distribution. The Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada has established a national working group to assist in developing a national strategic approach to the problem. Further, the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General in British Columbia has designated a senior civil servant to focus specifically on developing a response strategy for the province.

Equally encouraging, there is a wealth of information now available about how other jurisdictions are working to handle the problem. In fact, one outstanding starting place to develop a sense of how individual communities might respond to the problem, is the U.S. government's new website at www.methresources.gov. This site is essentially a comprehensive clearinghouse for information on all aspects of the methamphetamine problem. Visitors to the site can learn of what various jurisdictions are doing in terms of enforcement, legislative changes, pharmacy rules, meth watch programs, treatment programs, and other response mechanisms and collaborative strategies. At the same time they can be directed to those jurisdictions that have seen dramatic introductions in both meth labs and meth use. Importantly, the site also lists links to other very informative sites addressing other drugs and associated issues.

One of the matters that becomes very apparent upon visiting the website is that the picture provided regarding the response to the problem of meth production and use in the U.S. is helped enormously by the data monitoring and tracking systems in place there. Indeed, this makes it relatively easy to get a quick snapshot of what works and what does not appear to work across a broad range of jurisdictions. In the final analysis, Canada really needs a similar drug resource website, and a similar annual tracking system in place, to facilitate the provision of multi-jurisdictional analysis and helpful cross - comparisons of intervention strategies.

References

Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse. "Fact Sheet: Methamphetamine" Washington, D.C.: Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2003.

Health Canada. "Drug Analysis Report on Designer Drugs Seized in Quebec". Royal Canadian Mounted Police Report. Health Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 2004.

McEwen, T., et. al. "Combating Methamphetamine Laboratories and Abuse". In Community Oriented Policing Services – COPS Innovations A Closer Look. U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. 2003.

National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors. Written Testimony for Hearing on Methamphetamine Abuse, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies, Washington D.C., 2005.

Oregon State Police and Oregon Narcotics Enforcement Association. "Oregon Meth Lab Stats: Pre and Post Board of Pharmacy Rule". Retrieved June 7, 2005 from www.oregondec.org/OregonMethLabStats.pdf

Peel, R. et. al. "Intentional and Unintentional Poly-Drug Use Associated with Ecstasy Users" in Designer Drugs and Raves (second edition) by Scott Rintoul (editor), RCMP Drug Awareness Section, "E" Division, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Vancouver, 2004.

Plecas, D. et. al. "Marihuana Growing Operations in British Columbia Revisited: 1997-2003". Centre for Criminal Justice Research (CCJR), University College of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, B.C., 2005.

Appendix A: Incident Form

Var. #	Code	Variable Description and Values
1		ID # (Use assigned numbers)
2		File Year (1=1997, 2=1998, 3=1999, 4=2000, 5=2001, 6=2002, 7=2003)
3		File Number
4		Street Number
5	Street Name:	
6	- -	Date offence reported (dd-mm-yy)
7	- -	Date offence attended (dd-mm-yy)
8		Time elapsed (days)
9		Source of complaint
10		Status of complaint (1=founded, 2=unfounded, 3=no action, 4=other, 5= founded but too late)
11		Type of facility
12		Type of lab (1=addict-based, 2=economically-based)
13		Form (1=operational, 2=non=operational, 3=boxed, 4=dump site, 5=chem. Cache)
14		Rented (1=rented, 2=owned, 3=other, 4=don't know)
15		Type of drug being produced (1=methamphetamine, 2=MDMA, 3=MDA, 4=other phenethylamines, 5=GHB, 6=THC extraction, 7=precursor, 8=other (specify)
16		Amount of drug seized (grams)
17		Firearms seized (0=none, 1=prohibited, 2=restricted, 3=other, 4=mix)
18		Other weapons seized (1=yes, 0=no)
19		Equipment seized (1=yes, 0=no)
20		Lab Equipment (1=handmade, 2=professional)
21		Amount of cash seized (Nearest C$, 1US$=1.5C$)
22		Number of children present
23		Fire involved (1=yes, 0=no, D.K.=3)
24		Chemical hazards present (1=yes, 0=no)
25		Compressed gas cylinder (1=yes, 0=no)
26		Damaged structure present (1=yes, 0=no)
27		Heat stress present (1=yes, 0=no)

Source of Complaint

1 = crime stoppers/informant
2 = routine check
3 = serving a warrant
4 = landlord
5 = other crime
6 = general investigation
7 = BC Hydro
8 = other
9 = missing
10 = neighbour
11= traffic violation /incident
12= fire services/Hazmat
13= Emergency Medical

Type of facility

1 = house
2 = apartment/multiple units
3 = warehouse/commercial
4 = detached building e.g. shed, barn.
5 = vehicle
6 = other
7 = residential garage
8 = storage locker
9 = trailer
10 = missing

28		Leaking containers present (1=yes, 0=no)
29		Burn hazard present (1=yes, 0=no)
30		Guard dog present (1=yes, 0=no, 3=DK)
31		Precursors (Class “A” or “B”) present/used and quantities of each (list)
32		Recipe used/Synthesis route
33		Precursor/chemical source (1=retail purchase, 2=commercial purchase from licensed dealer, 3=suspect is a licensed dealer)
34		Disposal of waste (1=residential garbage, 2=sewer/drain, 3=dump site)
35		Production capacity of lab (1=<50grams, 2=50-<250 grams, 3=250-<500 grams, 4=500-<1kg, 5=1kg-<5kg, 6=5kg-<10kg, 10kg+
36		Use of violence at time of arrest (1=yes, 0=no)
37		Type of seizure (1=case, 2=no case)
38		Charges laid by Crown (1=yes, 0=no)
39		Number of suspects

Appendix B: Suspect Coding Sheet

ID: _____

Ethnicity:
1= Caucasian
2=Oriental (except Vietnamese)
3=East Indian
4=Black/African
5=Aboriginal
6=Other
7=Vietnamese

Number	Code	Variables Description and Values
1	Surname:	
2	First given name:	
3	Second given name:	
4		Number of aliases
5	- -	D.O.B. (dd-mm-yy)
6		Place of birth (town/city)
7		Gender (1=male, 2=female)
8		Ethnicity
9		Citizenship (1=Canadian, 2= Other)
10		**FPS Number**
11		**Production charge - CDSA s. (7)** (1= charged, 2=stay, 3=not guilty, 4=guilty), 5= warrant before charge, 6= warrant after charge
12		Prison (No. of months)
13		Conditional Prison (No. of months)
14		Probation (No. of months)
15		Fine ($ amount)
16		Community service order (No. of hours)
17		Restitution ($ amount)
18		Prohibition order (1=yes, 0=no)
19		Conditional or absolute discharge (1=yes, 0=no)
20		**Poss. for trafficking – CDSA s. (5)** (1= charged, 2=stay, 3=not guilty, 4=guilty)
21		Prison (No. of months)
22		Conditional Prison (No. of months)
23		Probation (No. of months)
24		Fine ($ amount)
25		Community service order (No. of hours)
26		Restitution ($ amount)
27		Prohibition order (1=yes, 0=no)
28		Conditional or absolute discharge (1=yes, 0=no)
29		**Simple possession – CDSA s.(4)** (1= charged, 2=stay, 3=not guilty, 4=guilty)
30		Prison (No. of months)
31		Conditional Prison (No. of months)
32		Probation (No. of months)
33		Fine ($ amount)
34		Community service order (No. of hours)
35		Restitution ($ amount)
36		Prohibition order (1=yes, 0=no)
37		Conditional or absolute discharge (1=yes, 0=no)
38		**Theft of Hydro - CCC s.326** (1= charged, 2=stay, 3=not guilty, 4=guilty)
39		Prison (No. of months)
40		Conditional Prison (No. of months)
41		Probation (No. of months)
42		Fine ($ amount)
43		Community service order (No. of hours)
44		Restitution ($ amount)
45		Prohibition order (1=yes, 0=no)
46		Conditional or absolute discharge (1=yes, 0=no)

47		**Firearms charges – CCC ss.84-96** (1= charged, 2=stay, 3=not guilty, 4=guilty)
48		Prison (No. of months)
49		Conditional Prison (No. of months)
50		Probation (No. of months)
51		Fine ($ amount)
52		Community service order (No. of hours)
53		Restitution ($ amount)
54		Prohibition order (1=yes, 0=no)
55		Conditional or absolute discharge (1=yes, 0=no)
56		**Other Criminal Code** (1= charged, 2=stay, 3=not guilty, 4=guilty)
57		Criminal Code Section Number
58		Prison (No. of months)
59		Conditional Prison (No. of months)
60		Probation (No. of months)
61		Fine ($ amount)
62		Community service order (No. of hours)
63		Restitution ($ amount)
64		Prohibition order (1=yes, 0=no)
65		Conditional or absolute discharge (1=yes, 0=no)

Appendix C: Criminal History

VAR #	ASSIGNED CODE	VARIABLE DESCRIPTION AND VALUES
1.		ID #
2.		ID # Suspect
3.		Year of first offence (actual year)
4.		Type of prior drug offences
5.		Number of prior drug offences
6.		Number of violent offences
7.		Number of prior non-compliance
8.		Number of prior offences
9.		Total number of stays
10.		Number of jurisdictions on criminal record
11.		Most frequent jurisdiction on record
12.		Number of provinces on record
13.		Most frequent province on record
14.		Year of first offence in B.C.
NOTES		

1 = possession
2 = trafficking
3 = prod
4 = 1 & 2
5 =1 & 3
6 = 2 & 3
7 = 1, 2 & 3