



## How to Recognize a Structure Containing a Meth Lab from the Outside

A house or other structure containing a meth lab will display “telltale signs” of meth production. Some of these signs concern the appearance of the structure itself, while others concern the behavior of the occupants. It is important to learn to recognize these “telltale signs” and know what to do if you see them.

### What to look for – appearance of the structure

Houses and other structures containing meth labs often have one or more of the following characteristics:

- Unusual Odors – Making meth produces powerful odors that may smell like ammonia or ether. These odors have been compared to the smell of cat urine or rotten eggs.
- Covered Windows – Meth makers often blacken or cover windows to prevent outsiders from seeing in.
- Strange Ventilation – Meth makers often employ unusual ventilation practices to rid themselves of toxic fumes produced by the meth-making process. They may open windows on cold days or at other seemingly inappropriate times, and they may set up fans, furnace blowers, and other unusual ventilation systems.
- Elaborate Security – Meth makers often set up elaborate security measures, including, for example, “Keep Out” signs, guard dogs, video cameras, or baby monitors placed outside to warn of persons approaching the premises.
- Dead Vegetation – Meth makers sometimes dump toxic substances in their yards, leaving burn pits, “dead spots” in the grass or vegetation, or other evidence of chemical dumping.
- Excessive or Unusual Trash – Meth makers produce large quantities of unusual waste that may contain, for example:
  - packaging from cold tablets
  - lithium batteries that have been torn apart
  - used coffee filters with colored stains or powdery residue
  - empty containers – often with puncture holes – of antifreeze, white gas, ether, starting fluids, Freon, lye, drain opener, paint thinner, acetone, alcohol, or other chemicals
  - plastic soda bottles with holes near the top, often with tubes coming out of the holes
  - plastic or rubber hoses, duct tape, rubber gloves, or respiratory masks

### What to look for – behavior of the occupants

Some “telltale signs” of a house containing a meth lab relate not to the appearance of the structure but rather to the behavior of its occupants. You should look for:

- Paranoid Behavior – Meth makers tend to act in a manner that is extremely paranoid and

secretive. For example, they may monitor passing cars, show great suspicion toward strangers, and – as noted above – construct elaborate security systems around their homes.

- **Staying Inside** – Residents of houses containing meth labs may remain inside their homes for extended periods of time. Many meth addicts and meth makers are not only paranoid and secretive, but also unemployed.
- **Smoking Outside** – By the same token, residents of houses and other structures containing meth labs often go outside to smoke. They do this to avoid igniting a fire or explosion when matches, lighters, or cigarettes come into contact with the highly combustible chemicals and fumes found in a meth lab.
- **Frequent Visitors** – Although residents of a house or other structure containing a meth lab may stay in or near their homes, they often receive a large number of visitors, especially at night. These visitors may be bringing supplies, taking away meth, using meth, hanging out, or any combination of these activities.
- **Mobile Garbage** – To avoid detection of their illegal activities, meth makers may burn their trash, place it in the trash collection area of another house or building, or cart it away and dump it elsewhere.

### **What to do**

**STAY CALM.** Keep your distance and never take matters into your own hands.

**PROTECT YOURSELF.** Do not approach the structure or confront its occupants. Both meth labs and meth users are extremely dangerous and unpredictable. Keep yourself and your family safe, and let law enforcement authorities do their job!

**PROTECT OTHERS.** Alert any innocent bystanders who may be in imminent danger, such as children playing in the front yard of a home you believe may contain a meth lab.

**ALERT LAW ENFORCEMENT.** Alert local law enforcement authorities without delay.

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[www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov](http://www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov)



### **Consumer Fraud Hotlines**

**Chicago**  
1-800-386-5438  
TTY: 1-800-964-3013

**Springfield**  
1-800-243-0618  
TTY: 1-877-844-5461

**Carbondale**  
1-800-243-0607  
TTY: 1-877-675-9339