

Los Angeles City Fire Department
TRAINING BULLETIN

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December 1978

Training Bulletin #36

IDENTIFICATION OF PHENCYCLIDINE AND CLANDESTINE
LABORATORIES

The widespread use of PCP in the last three years has presented law enforcement and the fire services with an increasingly difficult task, especially in Southern California where the drug has gained a popularity unequaled throughout the nation. While police and community groups are coordinating highly visible programs to deal with the PCP problem, this bulletin was prepared to acquaint personnel of this Department with the not so visible hazard that growing PCP use has created for this Department.

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PHENCYCLIDINE (PCP)

PCP was developed as an anesthetic and from 1963-1967 was marketed under the trade name Sernyl. Since 1968, PCP has been legally available only to veterinarians as an animal anesthetic (Sernylan). Because of the varied effects PCP has on its users, it can be neither classified as a stimulant, depressant, or hallucinogenic. Low dosages may result in stimulant-related symptoms, while high dosages may cause depressant-like behavior. Some common symptoms associated with PCP are:

Nystagmus, an involuntary rapid movement of the eyeball when it is focused to the extreme right, extreme left, up or down

Physical strength beyond normal capacities

Staring, due to lack of response to visual stimuli

Delusions or hallucinations

Unable to feel pain

Agitated, excited, bizarre behavior progressing to complete danger to himself and others

Slow and slurred speech progressing to no speech

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Lack of muscle coordination with restlessness, repetitive movement and facial grimacing

II. TREATMENT

Prior to arrival of paramedic or ambulance personnel, emergency treatment of such patients should be:

1. Immediate removal from the affected area
2. Restraint
3. Checking the airway, breathing and circulation
4. With chemical burn patients, saturation with copious amounts of water, especially for eye burns
5. Immediate oxygen inhalation or resuscitation for unconscious patients

PCP use reportedly results in increased rates of fetal loss, decreased fertility, chromosome breakage and, among offspring, a larger incidence of birth defects.

The most common forms of PCP found in the Los Angeles area are:

Crystalline which is inhaled or sprinkled on another substance and smoked

Liquid which produces "angel dust" when mixed with leafy substances and dried

Tablets

Cigarettes, commercial brands dipped in liquid PCP

III. LABORATORY IDENTIFICATION

Chemicals used for PCP manufacturing are extremely toxic and volatile, increasing the likelihood of explosion and fire which, in turn, may almost certainly result in toxic

fumes. The dangers present when confronting illicit laboratories can be minimized by awareness of the presence of a laboratory.

A variety of chemicals are used in PCP manufacture, the most lethal of which are potassium cyanide and hydrochloric acid which when mixed together produce Hydrogen Cyanide Gas, the gas used in the gas chamber.

Another chemical, phenyl magnesium bromide, will explode when brought into contact with water. This substance is usually recognized by the presence of magnesium turnings in a flask or container which is packed in ice. It is important to maintain this ice pack and not let any water enter the flask itself.

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The following, from the Los Angeles Police Department, are common indicators of an illicit drug laboratory:

1. Usually, because of the danger of fire and the presence of toxic fumes, no one will actually live at the location.
2. Attempts will be made to seal the doors and windows to conceal the odor.
3. The operator may install large ventilation fans for fume dispersment.
4. Delivery of 55-gallon steel drums.
5. Delivery of unusually large amounts of ice.
6. A strong, distinctive odor of ether.
7. The location is sparsely furnished.
8. Destruction of plant life may be noticeable due to dumping of chemicals.

The presence of these indicators may corroborate the belief that an illicit laboratory has been located. Local police should be notified for further investigation.

It has been estimated that nearly 30% of illegal PCP laboratories are found because the highly volatile chemicals cause the labs to explode or catch fire. It is the volatility of PCP's chemical components and the user's immunity to pain, and not the fear of fatal overdoses, which are the immediate causes of concern.

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