

# Know the signs . . .

As you travel through forest or woodland areas as part of your duties or for recreation, chances are there may be other people in the area. While most people you may encounter are there to enjoy leisure activities or to fulfill job duties, some have criminal agendas. In fact, public and privately owned forests are fast becoming areas where criminals conduct a variety of illegal activities including drug production, theft, vandalism, arson, and criminal extremist activities. People involved in these actions can be extremely dangerous. If you plan to venture into woodland areas, knowing what signs to look for is vital to keeping you and others safe.

*This brochure is intended to provide precautionary guidelines to help prevent crimes from occurring and increase your safety while you visit or work in rural forests and parks.*

## Marijuana

Marijuana is the most frequently used illicit drug in the world and one of the most prevalent drugs produced outdoors. Marijuana may resemble tobacco and generally includes the dried shredded leaves, stems, seeds, and flowers from the *cannabis sativa* plant. The marijuana plant contains THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) which produces a mind-altering effect on users. Short-term effects of marijuana use include problems with short-term memory, distorted perception, impaired coordination and balance, increased heart rate, bloodshot eyes, and increased appetite.



Large outdoor marijuana growing operations, some numbering in the thousands, have been discovered on private property, in National Parks, and in Bureau of Land Management and National Forest System lands. In the past several years, large outdoor grows operated by Mexican drug cartels have become more prevalent, with some plots discovered near populated areas of public lands and parks. Law enforcement officers have found a variety of security measures at camps such as barbed wire fences, tree stands, crude alarm systems, and surveillance equipment (walkie-talkies, night-vision goggles, radios).



Individuals who grow cannabis outdoors may aggressively, even violently, protect their investment. Law enforcement has reported large operations are protected by armed individuals. Booby-traps, noisemakers, and small explosive devices are occasionally found at the sites. Thousands of weapons are seized nationally at outdoor grows each year.



Marijuana cultivation sites often cause serious environmental damage, such as destruction of timber and vegetation, wildlife poaching, and use of pesticides that contaminate waterways. Pesticides can be highly toxic and should not be handled.



Due to weather patterns, marijuana is grown outdoors primarily during the spring and summer months with harvesting occurring during early fall. Cultivators may use gravity-flow irrigation systems that divert water from nearby streams to flow through plastic tubing to gardens or develop their own lined ponds.

### Signs of a marijuana grow

- Evidence of cultivation, drip-irrigation methods, PVC pipe, or terraced gardens.
- Use of camouflage tarping.
- Unusual structures with garden tools, buckets, fertilizer bags and large amounts of trash.
- Isolated camps, trailers, or tents where there is no recreational activity nearby.
- A vehicle regularly seen in the same remote area.
- Mesh-covered nurseries or plots containing plants at various stages of growth.
- Counter-surveillance such as lookout posts or tree stands in isolated areas.



# Clandestine Labs



A clandestine lab is a rudimentary lab that is used to produce illegal drugs such as methamphetamine, ecstasy, or LSD. These labs have been assembled in remote areas to avoid detection from law enforcement and to conceal strong odors emitted during production.

Clan labs and their operators can be extremely dangerous. Methamphetamine, or "meth" production may result in explosions and fires that can result in the injury or death of those who knowingly or unknowingly come into contact with a lab or lab waste.



While tighter restrictions on precursor ingredients such as pseudoephedrine (an active ingredient in cold medicines) have contributed to a large drop in meth labs in Oregon, opportunities still exist for people to manufacture the drug through activities such as smuggling restricted ingredients from other states and prescription fraud.



Some users have begun to manufacture or "cook" meth in small batches using two-liter soda bottles or other small containers. This method, commonly referred to as "shake and bake", is fast, inexpensive, and can turn the backseat of a car, bathroom stall, or backpack into a makeshift drug lab. The bottles can be

highly dangerous if opened, with the potential to cause flash fire explosions and release toxic fumes. The discarded bottles contain a poisonous residue or sludge. **Don't touch!**



Meth by-products are corrosive, flammable, and toxic. Meth "cooks" often pour excess chemicals directly on to the ground, down storm drains or wells, or into streams or lakes, which contaminate water supplies, kill wildlife, and destroy woodland areas.

### The following chemicals are commonly used to make meth:



- Rubbing alcohol
- Automotive starting fluids
- Iodine tincture/crystals
- Rock salt/table salt
- Cold tablets with ephedrine/pseudoephedrine
- Anhydrous ammonia
- Solvents
- Camping fuel
- Muriatic acid
- Red Devil Lye
- Cold packs with ammonium nitrate

## How to identify a meth lab

### Large amounts of trash including:



◀ Fuel containers, drain cleaner, lithium batteries, neon-stained coffee filters, empty boxes of cold/allergy pills, match books with missing striker pads, anti-freeze containers.

■ Strong chemical odors, such as ether, ammonia, or cat urine.

▶ Bottles or jars with glass tubing attached.



◀ Propane tanks with fittings that have turned blue or green.



■ Signs of chemical burns, spills, or burn piles with evidence of meth ingredients.

■ Vehicles loaded with liquid or chemical containers such as propane tanks, thermos or plastic drink bottles.

### If you suspect you are at a meth lab:

- **DO NOT ENTER** a structure that contains a meth lab. Reactions between chemicals, or exposing chemicals to water or air, can cause fire and explosions.
- **DO NOT OPEN OR TOUCH** surfaces, coolers, containers, trash bags, waste or touch meth lab operators. Contact with meth by-products can result in chemical burns. Inhaling toxic gases can send you to the hospital or can be fatal.
- **DO NOT DISTURB** the cooking process.
- **LEAVE THE AREA IMMEDIATELY.** Labs may have booby traps.

## Other Dangerous Drugs



In the last few years, law enforcement agencies have seized tens of thousands of illegal poppy plants from rural areas in several Oregon counties. These poppy plants produce opium which is used to make heroin. Plants have been found

growing in multiple plots and are typically found in older slash burn areas. Some plants grow as tall as four feet.

Several species of mushrooms have hallucinogenic compounds and are illegally cultivated in indoor and outdoor grow sites in much of the country, especially in the Pacific Northwest region. Hallucinogenic mushrooms, such as the psilocybe variety, have become popular as people discover they are profitable and simple to grow.





In addition to illegal drug activity, urban-associated crimes such as theft, vandalism, arson, and acts of criminal extremism occur in rural forests and parks. When visiting or working in these areas, it is important to always be aware, alert and cautious. Report unusual sightings or incidents to local law enforcement only after you have relocated to a safe area.

## Theft

Crimes committed on public lands are often similar to those which occur in urban areas, such as vehicle or property theft. Some illegal activities, such as theft, or "poaching", of wildlife and plants, are unique to public and private forests and parks. Poaching can take a variety of forms, such as harvesting trees or plants without a permit, or hunting wildlife without a license, during closed



season, or using artificial light as a hunting aid. Offenders have also stolen artifacts from Native American and archeological sites.

In addition, metal theft is a persistent problem in rural, as well as urban, areas. Offenders have stolen highway and road signs, equipment, aluminum guard railing from county bridges, and railroad sensor wire. Metal theft is often committed by drug addicts (mostly meth users) who have turned to stealing metal in order to make a quick profit at scrap yards to fund their habit.



## Vandalism and Arson

While drug production and theft are often committed for financial gain, motives for crimes such as vandalism and arson can range from revenge to attention-seeking. Common targets of vandalism in forest lands are road signs, gates,



posts, logging and forestry equipment, and structures. Vandals have also damaged and defaced live trees and archeological sites.



Wildland arsonists set fires that endanger citizens, put firefighters at risk of injury or death, and result in economic losses to forest landowners and communities. Arson in forest lands is a crime that carries an enormous and uncontrolled potential for loss of life, destruction of environmental resources, and damage to property.



## Criminal Extremism



Takeover and violence perpetrated by members of criminal extremist groups also occur in woodland areas. Criminal extremists can include environmental, animal rights, and anarchist militants, members of hate groups, and anti-government militias.



Most activists do not advocate violence or criminal acts, however, criminal extremists are known to engage in illegal activity such as criminal mischief, intimidation, assault, and arson.

While visiting or working in forest lands and parks, please be aware that criminal extremists have used remote areas to gather and train for criminal purposes. Offenders may be armed, and if approached during a training exercise or "operation", could pose a danger to you.



## Avoid Confrontation

- **Do not rush into areas you are unfamiliar with.** If you come across suspicious activity, such as marijuana grows, meth labs, or extremist activity . . . leave the area immediately and notify law enforcement as soon as you are safe. Keep phone numbers handy.
- **Avoid an encounter if you can.** Don't try to assist law enforcement by making contact and attempting to get more information.
- **Do not approach or confront suspected individuals;** do not indicate in any way you are suspicious of their activities.
- **If you cannot avoid an encounter, try to be as casual and non-threatening as possible.** Appear ignorant regarding any suspicious activity. Be prepared to explain why you are in the area (camping, fishing, hiking).

## Safety Guidelines

As a general rule . . .

- ✓ **Be aware of your surroundings at all times.**
- ✓ **Make sure people know where you are.** Travel in pairs, if possible. Maintain the ability to communicate.
- ✓ **Do not approach suspects or enter the suspicious area.**
- ✓ Make every effort to **avoid suspicious packages or equipment**, they may be highly volatile or toxic.
- ✓ **Do not take photographs or collect evidence.** Do not touch, smell or move anything.
- ✓ **Immediately leave the area.** The safest exit point is typically along the same route you entered.
- ✓ As soon as you are safe, write down a detailed description of the location (landmarks, GPS coordinates), people, vehicle(s), and signs of suspicious activity you observed.
- ✓ **Report to local law enforcement agencies ASAP.**

**Don't let these precautions scare you away from visiting and enjoying Oregon's natural beauty - Just be aware!**

### My Law Enforcement Contacts Are:

Sheriff: \_\_\_\_\_

City PD: \_\_\_\_\_

State Police: \_\_\_\_\_

Land Management Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

### Company Contacts:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Website References:

www.usdoj.gov/dea  
 www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov  
 www.fs.fed.us/r6/mthood/leo



This publication is specially prepared on behalf of the ONDCP High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program and the National Marijuana Initiative.

Prepared by the Oregon Department of Justice, Criminal Justice Division, Analytical Unit. November 2009.

**Keep above visor for reference**

# Risk/Resource Guide to Criminal Activity on Forestlands

## Second Edition



## Illegal Drugs, Theft, Vandalism, Arson and Criminal Extremism

**Report suspicious activity to your local law enforcement agency or Oregon State Sheriff's Association:**  
**(800) 624-4405**

**Oregon Department of Justice  
 Oregon HIDTA Program  
 Western States Information Network  
 Salem, OR 97301  
 (503) 378-6347/fax (503) 373-1936**