Secluded rural areas—including Illinois state parks—are targets in the national methamphetamine epidemic.

Meth Country

Story By Kathy Andrews

(Photo By DNR Conservation Police.)

Two Conservation Police Officers (CPOs) working a deer poaching complaint along the Randolph and Perry County line filed this report:

"About 9:30 p.m. Sunday evening, a truck was spotted in a field. After a short pursuit the vehicle was stopped. It was occupied by two subjects. They had not been deer poaching but were interrupted in the middle of cooking methamphetamine (meth). Ten felonies and four misdemeanor charges were filed against the subjects. The state task force was called to clean up the lab. Approximately 1,300 grams of meth was recovered."

Production of meth is escalating throughout the nation. In 2004, Illinois police seized 959 meth labs—a significant increase from the 24 labs found seven years earlier. Police, fire and park personnel are trained in identification of labs, with the removal of tainted materials left to highly trained experts.

Criminals often seek secluded areas, including state parks, for methamphetamine production. Visitors should recognize signs of a meth lab and report suspicious activities to officials.

The nature of Illinois' state parks makes them a prime location for this illegal activity.

"Some people choose to cook meth in their home, business or vehicle, but others seek secluded areas, such as industrial districts and remote rural areas—including state parks," explained CPO Jay Danner. "Because the risk of fire or explosion is extremely high, and the inhalation of vapors and gases produced in the process is hazardous to human health, everyone should know the key signs of the presence of a meth lab."

Park visitors, especially those accessing more remote locations, should report suspicious activities or trash to park staff, a CPO or local police agency. Despite your good intentions to help the state keep its parks clean you should resist the temptation to touch or remove trash from a suspected meth area.

"The Department of Natural Resources is committed to keeping Illinois state parks clean, family-oriented facilities," said Tony Mayville, director of the Office of Land Management. "We greatly appreciate any information visitors can provide of people mistreating the serenity and beauty of our parks."

(Photos By the Illinois State Police Zone 5 Methamphetamine Response Team.)

Signs of a potential meth lab

Do not take chances. If you encounter suspicious activities or trash, remain calm, leave the scene and notify appropriate authorities. Key indicators of a potential meth lab are:

Unusual odors: ether, ammonia, acetone or other chemicals

Trash: chemical containers, coffee filters, duct tape, packaging from cold tablets, cans, plastic bottles, glass jars, hot plates, electric skillets, used syringes, plastic tubing, batteries, plastic bags, white gasoline, paint thinner

For further information, visit www.dea.gov/concern/clandestine_indicators.html or www.isp.state.il.us/crime/methlab.cfm.