

Officers seeking wanted person instead find smoking lab; parents cautioned

Written by Marty Randall

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Officers with the Austin Police Department and Sheriff's Department got a surprise the other day.

Instead of finding a person wanted on a Scott County warrant at a home in southern Jackson County, they instead located a still-smoking, illegal lab set up to make the illegal drug methamphetamine.

Based on a tip, officers went to a residence on County Road 950E northeast of Austin on March 12. They had been told a person wanted on a warrant would be found there.

While searching for the suspect, several officers located what they recognized to be the remains of a meth lab. Though it appeared to be abandoned, a portion of it was emitting smoke, they reported.

Officers backed out of the area, secured the scene and contacted members of the Indiana State Police team trained to dismantle meth labs.

ISP personnel came to the scene and bagged the lab. Sheriff Dan McClain said the officers involved in the situation followed proper procedure.

"Our officers are trained to recognize such illegal operations and contact the experts who can safely dismantle such labs. Meth ingredients are cancer-causing and can harm people who stumble across them. We strongly urge the public to call the Sheriff's Department at 752-8400 to report such activity so that the remains of any lab can be dealt with in a responsible manner," advised the sheriff.

As weather conditions improve this spring, parents should survey nearby wooded areas where their children might play. Parents should caution their youngsters to never pick up what may look like a discarded bottle or a strange backpack and to stay away from areas or buildings that smell of chemicals. "Meth labs can take many shapes and be located indoors or outdoors. Meth

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'cooks' don't care about the mess they leave behind, even if that mess contains chemicals hazardous to others. Please keep your children safe by telling them these simple rules. If they see a suspicious object in a ditch, wooded area or shed, leave it and tell a responsible adult as quickly as possible," urged Sheriff McClain.

For local information on meth hazards, contact any law enforcement agency. Persons may also call the Meth Lab Hotline at 1-800-453-4756 to report a clandestine lab in Indiana.