

Police discover deadly drug lab near school

Two arrested for 'crank' manufacture

By Sean Murphy
Staff Writer

HAMPTON — Police in Hampton and Exeter, together with officers of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, confiscated a "crank" drug lab yesterday in a field in Exeter located within a school zone.

Evidence of the lab, which was put on display yesterday morning at the Hampton police station on Ashworth Avenue, looked deceptively low-tech. It was made up of several household elements, plastic jugs, mayonnaise jars, and other common items.

"I think my wife buys the same brand for the kids' medication," Hampton Police Detective Dan Gidley said while pointing at several packages of over-the-counter allergy medicine.

But detectives said that the materials, when properly mixed, will produce one of the deadliest new drugs to hit the underground; methamphetamine, known more commonly as "crank."

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Police moved in on the lab at 4 p.m. yesterday, calling in Exeter Hazardous Materials teams to help contain several dangerous chemicals, including ether and a tank of anhydrous ammonia.

"It's a tank that resembles a propane tank," Gidley said.

Police said that two of the suspects in the case had allegedly stolen a 1992 Ford Explorer pickup truck from South Carolina, and were using it to transport most, if not all, of the materials to the site.

Some of the materials used in the lab were highly explosive; definitely not safe to be carrying around in a truck, detectives said.

"The process is so dangerous," said Hampton Police Detective Phil Russell. "You go out on Exeter Road, you'd be in pieces by the end."

Worse was the sulfuric acid taken from several containers of drain cleaner. The acid is extremely corrosive, as evidenced by several confiscated items of clothing police showed with holes in them.

Hampton Police Detective Lynne Charleston said that all the dangerous materials were removed from the site. No children at the nearby Cooperative Middle School in Stratham are or ever were in danger from the hazardous materials, she said.

None of the finished product was among the evidence collected, nor was any money or weapons found. Crotts said there had been no evidence so far of crank-dealing in the area.

"We'd have been seeing some sort of symptoms or signs and we haven't seen any," he said.

The drug's estimated street value is \$100 per gram. Police estimated the lab's value at \$100,000.

Police arrested Danny Ray Crisp, 25, of 11 M St., Hampton Beach, and Wendy M. Walker, 24, of the same address. Both are charged with unlawful manufacture of a controlled drug, a Class A felony.

In addition, Crisp is also charged with being a drug enterprise leader, also a Class A felony.

Both are scheduled for arraignment this morning in Hampton District Court.

Crotts said Crisp and Walker are the two chief suspects in the operation. Both Crisp and Walker recently came to the area from South Carolina. Crotts said that both have police records there, but are unknown to police in this area.

"The guy thought he had a million-dollar dream coming up here," Gidley said.

Police said the drug, which was first seen on the West Coast, has been sweeping through the South, and is now beginning to become popular in the Northeast.

The operation was located in a field off of Guinea Road in Exeter, just over the Hampton/Exeter town line. The site is also within the school zone of the new Cooperative Middle School.



Staff photo/Lara Bricker

Exeter Police Lt. Richard Kane inspects the site of a methamphetamine lab law enforcement authorities toppled Wednesday.

Police said this was the first drug lab of this size and sophistication anyone could remember discovering in this area.

"This is probably one of the first meth labs that we've come across," Crotts said.

Crotts credited the work of detectives Russell, Gidley and Charleston and research with the DEA for accomplishing the arrests so quickly.

DEA spokeswoman Special Agent Pam Mersky-Hay said she couldn't comment on the specifics of the case. However, she said any methamphetamine lab of any size is a threat because of the potency of the drug, and the volatility of the chemicals used in its manufacture.