



State of Tennessee

Justin P. Wilson, State Comptroller

For Immediate Release: Jan. 10, 2013

Comptroller Releases Report on Methamphetamine Production in Tennessee

Methamphetamine production continues in small laboratories in Tennessee and elsewhere around the country in spite of new laws regulating and tracking the sale of pharmacy products used to manufacture the illegal drug.

That is one of the findings of a report released today by the Comptroller's Offices of Research and Education Accountability about attempts to control access to legal products sold at pharmacies which are later used to create methamphetamine. Pseudoephedrine, the most common of the so-called "precursor" products used in manufacturing the drug, is an ingredient in many over-the-counter cold and allergy remedies. The report cautions that the relatively short history of precursor control policies and the limitations of available crime and drug use data make it difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of particular precursor control laws on the production of methamphetamine in small labs.

In 2011, the Tennessee General Assembly passed legislation to implement a real-time, electronic tracking system – the National Precursor Log Exchange (NPLEx) – to limit the quantities of precursor products that can be purchased by individuals. After much debate, NPLEx was chosen over a more restrictive requirement that people obtain prescriptions from doctors for the pharmacy precursors. The 2011 legislation included a directive for the Comptroller's office to conduct a study and issue a report.

According to the report, called "Methamphetamine Production in Tennessee," activity in small labs is prevalent in Tennessee and some other southern and mid-western states despite the implementation of pharmacy precursor sales limitations and enhanced electronic tracking systems. Law enforcement officials in Tennessee and nationally attribute the increase in methamphetamine lab incidents to the ability of producers to work around precursor control policies.

Three areas that have implemented prescription-only policies for methamphetamine precursors – Oregon, Mississippi and some parts of Missouri – have seen decreases in methamphetamine lab

incidents. However, two studies of the 2006 Oregon policy question the extent to which other factors may have contributed to the decline since other western states also had similar declines.

Mississippi and parts of Missouri, which were both high methamphetamine production areas in 2009 like Tennessee, saw a reduction in methamphetamine lab incidents in 2010. Law enforcement officials attribute the decline to the change to a prescription-only policy. Other nearby states without prescription-only policies did not see declines in 2010.

The report outlines several factors and options for policy makers to consider in evaluating whether to make a precursor control policy change. Issues include:

- The extent to which pharmacy precursors are used for methamphetamine production

Estimates vary from three to five percent by the Consumer Healthcare Products Association, which represents pharmaceutical companies, to somewhere between 30 percent and 70 percent by the Tennessee Methamphetamine and Pharmaceutical Task Force.

- The number of legitimate users of pharmacy precursors and the availability of non-precursor alternatives

Approximately 10 percent of adult Tennesseans purchased pharmacy precursors to methamphetamine from January through June 2012.

- The potential cost and access concerns to consumers of a prescription requirement

Assumptions that drive cost and access estimates of a prescription-only policy include whether consumers will switch to other over-the-counter medicines, whether additional doctor visits will be needed to obtain prescriptions for pseudoephedrine and the need for medical oversight for long-term use of pseudoephedrine.

- The adequacy of Tennessee's Controlled Substance Monitoring Database to track and control prescription-only methamphetamine precursor sales

- Funding alternatives for methamphetamine enforcement when current federal funding is depleted in 2013

The report emphasizes that precursor control policies focus on preventing or reducing local methamphetamine production, not methamphetamine use. A decrease in the supply of locally-produced methamphetamine may not necessarily result in a reduction in methamphetamine use.

Most of the methamphetamine available in many parts of the United States is supplied by Mexican criminal organizations and is produced in foreign and domestic super labs.

OREA is an agency within the Comptroller's Office that is charged with providing accurate and objective policy research and analysis for the Tennessee General Assembly and the public.

To view the report online, go to: <http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OREA/>

-30-

Media contact: Blake Fontenay, Communications Director, (615) 253-2668 or blake.fontenay@tn.gov

[Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury](#)
State Capitol Nashville, TN 37243
Phone: (615) 741-2501
Email: comptroller.web@cot.tn.gov