

Michael F. Easley  
Governor



State of North Carolina  
Office of the Governor

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For Release: **IMMEDIATE**  
Date: April 14, 2004

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**GOV. EASLEY ANNOUNCES NEW WEAPONS TO COMBAT SPREAD OF METH**  
*Provides two additional mobile units; Calls for tougher sentencing*

**RALEIGH** – Governor Mike Easley today announced a \$502,166 grant from the Governor’s Crime Commission to purchase two new mobile response vehicles that will expand the State Bureau of Investigation’s Clandestine Laboratory Response Program. Easley also announced that his office would work with Attorney General Roy Cooper to strengthen state laws regarding the extremely hazardous drug methamphetamine, also known as meth.

“Fifteen years as a prosecutor taught me that the first step in fighting this sort of criminal behavior is with aggressive, tough new penalties,” Easley said. “If you put children and our communities at risk to get high on meth, you are going to serve real prison time.

“We must give law enforcement first responders the tools they need to combat the spread of this drug and to help protect our citizens. Meth threatens our community in ways many other narcotics have not. It introduces new, unique hazards of explosions and toxic contamination to the home, community and environment. Our law enforcement agents need modern tools to combat these new dangers.”

The grant from the Governor’s Crime Commission will increase the number of SBI mobile labs in use to five and provide modern equipment to help them deal with the biological hazards of methamphetamine. The commission plans to add a total of six new units over a three-year period. Some of the equipment includes infrared gas detectors, gas monitors, laptops, radios, self-contained breathing apparatus equipment and decontamination showers.

SBI chemists will use the mobile units to identify potentially hazardous materials and provide better information to protect first responders at the scene. The equipment will reduce the need to transport dangerous materials from the clandestine labs back to the central SBI lab.

"Current laws are not strong enough to deter production of this dangerous drug," said Attorney General Roy Cooper. "With tougher sentences, better training and equipment, we will make important steps toward combating the spread of meth."

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Specific legislative proposals will be presented to the North Carolina General Assembly in the short session to enhance penalties for the manufacture of meth; enhance penalties for child endangerment; stiffen penalties for possession of precursor chemicals; and enhance penalties for providers of meth when a fatal overdose occurs.

Produced in “clan (clandestine) labs” throughout the country using readily available household chemicals and medicines, methamphetamine is the latest drug to victimize families and communities across North Carolina. Meth’s relatively inexpensive production process has a costly impact on children, first responders and neighbors exposed to the deadly toxic waste that results from the manufacturing, or “cooking,” of methamphetamine.

A decade ago, meth production and use was limited to the western part of the country. Over time, meth, a drug considered more addictive than crack, has spread state-by-state, making its way to the East Coast. In 1999, the State Bureau of Investigation discovered nine labs in North Carolina. By 2003, that number had risen to 177 labs. A total of 89 labs have been discovered in the first few months of this year.

Meth’s spread has brought a new wave of environmental and social costs. Last year, the Department of Social Services removed 69 children from the 177 meth labs discovered. Child Protective Services must put children exposed to such dangers into the state’s foster care system. Also, 27 first responders were injured from exposure to toxic fumes and flames from meth labs in 2003.

For every one-pound of meth produced, five to seven pounds of toxic byproducts are produced, which meth producers often dump into area sewers and water systems. Meth labs are prone to fires and explosion from cooking the toxic chemicals. Toxic byproducts leave homes, apartments and hotel rooms contaminated and unlivable until decontamination, at a cost of \$4,000 to \$10,000 per lab.

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