



PAT MCCRORY
GOVERNOR

NORTH CAROLINA
STATE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

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B. W. COLLIER
DIRECTOR

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety
Legislative Commission on Methamphetamine Abuse

FROM: B. W. Collier, SBI Director

RE: 2015 Annual Report on Methamphetamine Laboratories in North Carolina

Date: February 1, 2016

Pursuant to General Statute 90-113.63. "Beginning with the 2011 calendar year, the State Bureau of Investigation shall determine the number of methamphetamine laboratories discovered in the State each calendar year and report its findings to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety and to the Legislative Commission on Methamphetamine Abuse by March 1, 2012, for the 2011 calendar year and each March 1 thereafter for the preceding calendar year. The State Bureau of Investigation shall participate in the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program, assist in coordinating the drug control efforts between local and State law enforcement agencies, and monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the electronic record-keeping requirements included in G.S. 90-113.52A and G.S. 90-113.56. The SBI shall include its findings in the report to the Commission required by this section. (2011-240, s. 4.)"

During calendar year 2015, the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation responded to four hundred and sixty seven (467) Methamphetamine Drug Laboratory incidents throughout North Carolina, as compared to the five hundred and fifty-seven (557) lab incidents in 2014. This is the second year in a row lab responses have decreased. The main reason for this decline is the increasing availability of methamphetamine smuggled into the United States from Mexico. This methamphetamine is of high quality and is inexpensive, and is increasingly available across North Carolina. Over the counter Pseudoephedrine products remain the main precursor utilized in all of the Methamphetamine drug laboratories that were seized. Statewide, 109 children were removed from homes where methamphetamine was being manufactured last year, down from 147 in 2014.

The counties with the largest number of lab incidents in 2015 were Johnston (40), Gaston (38), Anson (27), Richmond (27), Onslow (25), Harnett (20), Sampson (19) and Wake (17). The counties with the largest increase in lab incidents from 2014 were Montgomery, New Hanover, Richmond, and Harnett.

During calendar year 2015, the National Pseudoephedrine Log Exchange System (NPLEEx), created in 2012 as a part of NC House Bill 12, blocked 47,682 sales of 63,905 boxes of products containing pseudoephedrine, up from 43,965 blocks of 56,000 boxes in 2014. The NPLEEx system potentially prevented more than 166,775 grams of pseudoephedrine from being converted to methamphetamine by illegal drug manufacturers in 2015. This amount of pseudoephedrine blocked could have been used to make more than 367 pounds of methamphetamine. This has been achieved through the stop sale feature of the system which allows retailers to block unlawful purchases at the point of sale. Law enforcement officers are able to use tools within the NPLEEx system to target and identify those purchasing pseudoephedrine for illicit means, i.e. for the manufacture of methamphetamine.

The most common method for obtaining pseudoephedrine products is through purchases from retail pharmacies. The amount of pseudoephedrine that an individual can legally purchase is restricted to 3.6 grams a day and 9 grams every 30 days. Investigators are continuing to see and identify methamphetamine “cooks” utilizing loosely organized groups of individuals, many methamphetamine addicts themselves, to supply the pseudoephedrine needed to manufacture methamphetamine. Evidence found at methamphetamine lab sites and interviews conducted by investigators over the past several years by Bureau agents conducting conspiracy investigations confirms the fact that cold and allergy medicine containing pseudoephedrine is being illegally obtained through the technique known as “smurfing.” This is the practice of people purchasing products containing pseudoephedrine at pharmacies and then attempting purchases at other stores that in total do not exceed the daily or monthly legal limit. This can be done by one individual or a group of individuals operating together in one city, multiple cities, multiple counties, or multiple states depending on the sophistication of smurfing in any particular region. These individuals not only supply the “cooks” with pseudoephedrine but also other materials needed to manufacture methamphetamine, such as lithium batteries, solvents such as camping fuel, and acids and bases. Significant amounts of pseudoephedrine, and other chemicals needed in the manufacturing process, can be obtained this way.

“Smurfs” also utilize false identification cards to purchase pseudoephedrine. They may use identification cards of friends and relatives to make illegal purchases, or pay strangers to purchase pseudoephedrine for them. The State Bureau of Investigation continues to lead methamphetamine conspiracy investigations that not only target the methamphetamine “cooks” but those that supply them pseudoephedrine and other precursor chemicals in exchange for methamphetamine or cash. These investigations have led to the arrest and convictions of more than 150 individuals over the past several years.

The “One Pot” or “Shake and Bake” method of manufacturing methamphetamine continues to be the dominant method of manufacturing in North Carolina and throughout the United States. Approximately 78% of the methamphetamine labs discovered in North Carolina in 2015 used this method. This method is fast and requires no specialized equipment, and all of the required chemicals are readily available through common retail outlets. The labs are very dangerous and extremely flammable, combining lithium, ammonium nitrate, lye, and pseudoephedrine with organic solvents like camping fuel or ether in a plastic bottle, all under high pressure. They present a danger not only to the “cook” making the methamphetamine but to law enforcement officers and other first responders tasked with responding to and dismantling them.

The SBI is the only agency in North Carolina with a unit of agents specially trained and equipped to dismantle, render safe, take evidentiary samples, and neutralize methamphetamine labs safely. The SBI continues to train other agents and local law enforcement officers throughout the state in identifying meth labs and to assist the Clandestine Laboratory Response Unit agents in the safe dismantling and disposal of meth labs on top of their full-time assignments. SBI Clandestine Laboratory Response Unit agents also provide for the safe transportation and disposal of methamphetamine lab waste throughout the state, at no cost to local law enforcement agencies.

Attachments: 2015 State Map of Meth Lab Incidents

Prepared by: Derek T. Duke

Special Agent in Charge

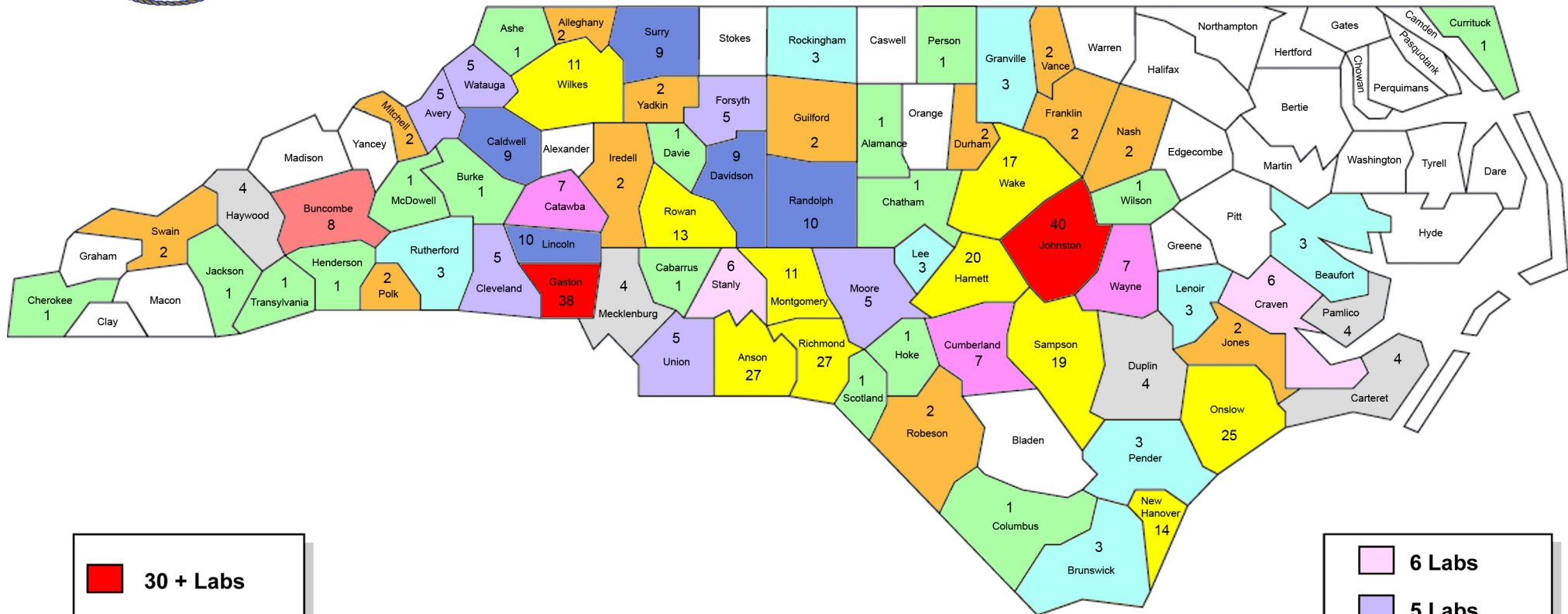
North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation



2015 Clandestine Lab Responses

Total: 467

(As of December 31, 2015)



- 30 + Labs
- 11 - 29 Labs
- 9 - 10 Labs
- 8 Labs
- 7 Labs

- 6 Labs
- 5 Labs
- 4 Labs
- 3 Labs
- 2 Labs
- 1 Lab

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State Bureau of Investigation