

**Opening Statement of Representative Elijah E. Cummings, D-MD**  
**Ranking Minority Member**  
**Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources**  
**Committee on Government Reform**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**108th Congress**

**Hearing on "Facing the Methamphetamine Problem in America"**

**July 18, 2003**

Mr. Chairman,

Methamphetamine, or "meth," is one of the major drug threats facing our nation.

A powerful stimulant that affects the central nervous system, meth is derived from amphetamine, a compound which is contained in over-the-counter nasal decongestants and bronchial inhalers and also used in certain medical applications, including weight loss treatments. Meth is a drug that can be smoked, snorted, orally ingested, or injected, and is known by a variety of street names, depending upon the form in which it is used. Meth often comes in a powder form that resembles granulated crystals and in a rock form known as "ice," which is preferred by those who smoke the drug.

Ingesting meth causes the release of high levels of dopamine into the section of the brain that controls the feeling of pleasure. The result is an intense rush and a high that can last up to twelve hours. The side effects of meth use are dangerous and sometimes fatal; they include convulsions, high body temperature, stroke, cardiac arrhythmia, stomach cramps, and shaking.

Meth can be addictive and abuse of the drug can cause violent behavior, anxiety, and insomnia, in addition to psychotic effects such as paranoia, hallucinations, mood swings, and delusions. Persistent users develop a tolerance for the drug that requires the user to take increasing amounts to achieve the desired effects. As a result, such users can suffer damage to the dopamine-producing cells of the brain.

Unlike drugs such as cocaine and heroin, which are produced from plants cultivated entirely outside of the United States, methamphetamine can be

manufactured using ingredients purchased in U.S. retail stores. Most of the production of U.S.-consumed methamphetamine is domestic -- perhaps as much as 75% coming from labs in California.

U.S. production today occurs in both "superlabs," which produce unprecedented amounts of high-purity methamphetamine, and "clandestine" labs small enough to be found in apartments, hotel rooms, rented storage spaces, and trucks. Many clandestine labs produce as little as ten pounds of meth a year, but their impact on the environment, and the cost of cleaning up these sites, can be huge. Collectively, clandestine labs produce over 20 metric tons of toxic waste each year, and individual labs can cost from a few thousand to more than a hundred thousand dollars to clean-up, depending upon size. Because the ingredients are not only toxic, but extremely volatile in combination, labs also pose a serious danger to people who may live in the immediate vicinity of the activity, including the children of small-scale manufacturers.

Drug Enforcement Agency estimates show that meth production and trafficking are rampant in the West and Midwest regions of the country. Traditionally, meth has been concentrated in the Western states, especially California, Arizona, and Utah. In recent years, the Midwest region has experienced tremendous growth in both trafficking and production, and that activity is spreading into the Southeast and Northeast regions. The majority of operations in the West region are controlled by Mexican drug trafficking organizations, based along the California-Arizona border.

There is also a significant problem with meth being imported from abroad, including from Asia. Our colleague, Representative Ed Case of Hawaii, will testify on our opening panel about the devastating impact of "crystal" meth imported to Hawaii from Korea and Japan, in addition to the so-called "yaba" pills that originate in Thailand. We'll also hear from Representative John Boozman concerning the impact of meth on his district in Arkansas.

Meth-abuse has not yet become a major problem in the communities of Baltimore and Howard Counties that I represent. Heroin, following in the footsteps of a devastating crack cocaine epidemic, is the primary drug threat in my congressional district. But the rapid spread of meth production, trafficking, and abuse in the United States underscores the fact that America's drug problem affects all parts of America, as well as the sad but

undeniable truth that no community is immune to the introduction of a dangerous new drug threat.

Today's hearing offers an opportunity to hear from two of our colleagues, and law enforcement officials at the federal, state, and local levels, concerning the challenges faced by communities affected by meth and meth-induced crime, efforts to combat the meth problem, and the additional resources that Congress should consider providing to assist those efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for continuing to shine a light on this issue in the Subcommittee. I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses and applaud each of them for their various efforts to combat this problem.