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Meth lab cleanup cash gone

With no federal money, local agencies must pay

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ATLANTA --- Federal money to reimburse local law enforcement for the cleanup of toxic methamphetamine labs has run out, which means local agencies will have to foot the bill.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reports that the Drug Enforcement Administration had \$2 million at the start of the fiscal year for the reimbursements. But that money was exhausted about a week ago because of a rise in the number of meth lab busts across the country, said agency spokesman Rusty Payne.

Georgia got the 10th largest portion of DEA cleanup funds distributed last year, with nearly \$520,000, and the state's problem seems to be getting worse. The number of meth lab incidents in the state rose from 167 to 257, or 54 percent, over the past three years, according to the DEA.

Meth is highly addictive and can be made using household substances that become volatile and potentially explosive when mixed.

Local police pay a private contractor after a meth lab is dismantled to dispose of the toxic materials in accordance with Environmental Protection Agency standards. The DEA money was used to pay for that expense, but it will now fall to local police and sheriff's departments.

"It's going to be a hit for the locals, for sure," Payne said.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation often helps with meth lab probes but is facing its own budget issues. There's no money at the state level to reimburse local agencies, said GBI inspector Fred Stephens. The agency is meeting with state environmental officials to see whether officers could be trained to do some cleanups themselves.

The cost to clean up a small meth lab is about \$1,500, said DEA spokesman Chuvalo Truesdell.

But some counties, such as Gwinnett and Cobb, have recently seen "super labs" that can produce hundreds of kilograms of meth. Those labs can cost tens of thousands of dollars to dismantle.