

## OUR CRYSTAL METH HELL

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By Peter Sheridan in Los Angeles



Crystal meth ingredients are readily available

**JONATHAN DIMBLEBY suggests drug use should be legalised. Perhaps he should read this shocking article about the terrible impact ‘crystal meth’ has had in America... and may one day have here.**

THE sleepy seaside tranquillity of Bournemouth was shattered this week when police evacuated Sunrise Lodge, cordoned off the property and warned neighbours of the risk of explosion and potentially deadly chemicals. Inside the former hotel, now a home less hostel, was found a harbinger of a deadly threat facing Britain: a suspected meth amphetamine factory.

The insidious drug, also known on the street as crystal meth, crank, ice, Tina and tweak, has become the scourge of America, destroying lives and ravaging communities with crime. The appearance of a meth lab amid the tourists and retirees of Dorset signals a spread of the substance that should send shivers down British spines. Dubbed “the poor man’s cocaine” meth is simple to make, cheap to buy, devastating in its destructiveness and more addictive than heroin.

It has been abused by middle-aged women seeking weight loss, gay clubbers craving its power to repress sexual inhibitions and teenagers searching for an instant high. Several celebrities have fallen prey to it. Before finding success with the Black Eyed Peas, singer Fergie battled meth addiction and Saving Private Ryan actor Tom Sizemore was arrested for meth possession in 2007.

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Pax Prentiss, the founder of Passages Malibu drug rehab centre in California

“Crystal meth is one of the most addictive substances on the planet and it does the most harm,” warns Pax Prentiss, the founder of Passages Malibu drug rehab centre in California that treats many famous people.

“The drug is very cheap and made out of chemicals you can buy in any drug store. It’s not uncommon for a celebrity with a heroin habit to pay up to \$500 a day but a typical meth habit is only \$20-\$40 a day.”

In Britain a gram of meth, which can fuel an addiction for five days, sells for around £25 but can be found for less than half that. Smoked in a glass pipe, snorted or injected it floods users’ brains with a massive amount of dopamine, the chemical that makes us feel happy, but leads to a brutal comedown and an insatiable craving for more. Addicts can become depressed, paranoid and violent. Meth causes kidney failure, internal bleeding, heart seizures and can lead to brain damage. Abusers soon look like zombies: grey skin pockmarked with lesions, cracked lips with rotting teeth and gums, sunken eyes and wild hair.

“I tried meth for the first time when I was 14,” says 18-year old Nina Wood, a recovering methamphetamine user.

“I thought I could use when I felt like it but eventually it took over my life. I lost a lot of weight, my hair started falling out and meth damaged my liver and kidneys. I would lie and steal to get a fix. I yelled at my family, slammed doors and punched walls. I wish I’d known before I started using. I wish I could take everything back.”

Meth’s lethal advance across the US has sparked one of the nation’s most harrowing and graphic ad campaigns ever in a bid to shock young Americans and it seems to be working. Chilling posters show before and after mug shots of meth addicts from their first arrest to their last, looking like Halloween horror-night ghouls.

If that doesn’t shake teens then a series of terrifying TV commercials will. Ads show clean-cut youngsters about to try their first hit of methamphetamine being terrorised by their future

addicted selves: curled up and blood-streaked shivering in a bathtub, robbing launderette customers in a frenzy and having sex with strangers for drug money.

Meth abusers are shown in horrifying close-ups: the vivid sores that scar their faces, the ravaged lips, broken teeth and deathly pallor. In one ad, after a baby-faced lad takes a puff from a meth pipe, a crowd of ravaged addicts emerge like the walking dead from the shadows of a dilapidated drug den, saying: “You did it kid, you’re one of us now. We’re going to be shooting up together, stealing together, sleeping together.” Howls of laughter greet the boy’s protest that he is only trying meth once.

One ad shows the sharp scissors one hallucinating addict used to carve out imaginary bugs that he believed were crawling under his skin. Another shows a boy beating up his mother when she tries to stop him stealing money from her purse. In another – reminiscent of Britain’s 2009 shocktactic campaign aimed at preventing people from texting while driving – a teenage girl wishes that she had been in a car crash, broken her neck and been paralysed rather than safely getting to the party where she first tried meth. Seen smoking the drug in a filthy flat she says: “Now this is my life.”

Other ads show teenaged meth addicts invading people’s homes and beating families to rob them or convulsing on the floor suffering from drug seizures. The message in each is the same: “This isn’t normal... but on meth it is.”

ALL of them have been directed by such luminaries as British advertising icon Tony Kaye and the Oscar-winning director of *Black Swan* Darren Aronofsky as part of a multi-million pound campaign run by The Meth Project. Originally launched in Montana, where boredom and rural poverty combine to make the cheap “high” of meth seem attractive, the ads now run in seven states from Hawaii to Georgia.

Montana, where meth-related arrests soared 90 per cent in the early 2000s, has seen a 63 per cent drop in use of the drug among teenagers since the campaign began and a 62 per cent drop in drug-related crime, according to authorities. The state, which used to rank fifth in the nation for meth abuse, now ranks 39th. Other states report evidence of usage dropping by more than 50 per cent.

“When they first came out it was a huge deal because you’d never seen anything like that on TV,” says Emily Dean, a Montana resident. “It doesn’t just tell you, ‘No, don’t do this.’ It shows you why you don’t do this.”

Montana’s Cascade County district attorney John Parker explains: “These ads have changed the consciousness of an entire generation of teenagers. They lay out in very graphic terms how this ruins lives.”

In Britain, despite meth becoming a banned Class A drug along side heroin and cocaine in 2006, the substance has insidiously spread throughout society. New formulations continue to skirt the law by creating legal variants that are just as deadly and the chemicals needed to make meth remain readily available. In 2009 police raided a flat in Tower Hamlets, East London, and seized meth with a street value of £1.5million. Drug dealer Richard Lubbock was sentenced to eight years in prison.

That same year UK border police seized £30,000 worth of meth and two Dutch smugglers were jailed. Most of the meth in Britain is imported from the Netherlands or Belgium but as seen this week, labs are springing up around the UK. And if it can happen in genteel Bournemouth it can happen in your home town.