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Statement

of

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before

the

Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control
U.S. House of Representatives

concerning

Methamphetamine Trafficking and Abuse

on

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DATA CENTER AND
CLEARINGHOUSE
FOR DRUGS AND CRIME

VF Orig Type II Meth.

Chairman Rangel and Members of the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control: I am pleased to be here today to discuss methamphetamine trafficking and abuse in this country, as well as the initiatives of the Drug Enforcement Administration to combat this problem.

Methamphetamine is a stimulant drug and a Schedule II controlled substance under the Controlled Substances Act. It is known on the streets by such names as "crank," "crystal," "meth," "speed," "gofast," and "ice."

Earlier this year, DEA initiated Project Crystal City -- a study using a nationwide survey to examine the methamphetamine trafficking and abuse situation in the United States. Field interviews were conducted of law enforcement personnel across the country. In addition, interviews were conducted at over 60 drug treatment centers in 23 states, and additional material was gathered from a wide variety of sources.

The study found that methamphetamine trafficking and abuse are present virtually everywhere in the United States. Abuse is widespread in the West and Southwest and in isolated pockets east of the Mississippi River. However, there is less methamphetamine in areas where cocaine trafficking is being conducted by established criminal groups.

The typical methamphetamine user is a white male, 22 to 26

years of age, who is employed in a blue-collar job. The most frequently cited occupations are in the construction trades and the trucking industry.

Treatment center personnel characterize methamphetamine users as lonely, isolated individuals, lacking in self-esteem, who have drug use histories. Intravenous use is mentioned most frequently as the method of administration followed by snorting and eating the drug.

Outlaw motorcycle gangs are the largest organized group involved with methamphetamine trafficking. In some areas, they control the market while in others they share the market with other traffickers. As a general rule, outlaw motorcycle gangs appear to be strongest in areas that are not influenced by traditional organized crime groups or other ethnic criminal organizations.

Clandestine laboratories are the principal source for the illicitly used methamphetamine in this country. Laboratories of all sizes have been found in a wide variety of locations, from sophisticated underground hideaways to motel rooms and residential kitchens, bathrooms, and garages. Generally, the most productive laboratories have been sited in secluded, rural areas away from the metropolitan distribution areas that these laboratories service. Laboratory operators run the gamut from grade school dropouts who are described as "cooks" to graduate

chemists with doctoral degrees.

Clandestine laboratories are usually operated on an irregular basis rather than on a regular schedule. Operators often produce a batch of methamphetamine, then disassemble the laboratory and store it or move it to another location while they acquire additional chemicals for the next run. The portability of these laboratories makes it very difficult for law enforcement authorities to detect these illegal operations.

Chemicals are obtained both from legitimate sources and from "rogue" chemical companies whose sole function is to supply necessary chemicals and equipment for use in illicit clandestine laboratories.

Methamphetamine trafficking represents a relatively simple way in which to rapidly make a great deal of money. The drug is simple to manufacture and lucrative to market. About \$200-\$400 worth of chemicals yields one pound of pure methamphetamine. Accumulative profits from the production/trafficking process, beginning with the laboratory operator and ending with the street dealer, amount to about \$90,000 from an initial pound of methamphetamine.

Traffickers frequently invest their ill-gotten gains in land, livestock, agricultural and industrial equipment, and precious metals. Among outlaw motorcycle gang-affiliated traffickers,

investments in bars, clubs, and limousine services are common.

A smokable crystalline form of methamphetamine, called "ice" has, in recent years, been showing up in Hawaii as well as in a limited number of areas along the West Coast. Manufactured in the Far East, this form of methamphetamine, at 90-100 percent purity, is being smuggled into Hawaii and sold on the street for about \$50 for one-tenth of a gram and anywhere from \$200 to \$400 for one gram. There is no indication, however, that domestic clandestine laboratory operators have discovered the methodology now being used to produce this illicit substance.

Ice smokers experience an energized high that generally lasts as long as 8-16 hours, compared with 10-15 minutes for crack cocaine. Ice can cause serious behavioral problems and heavy psychosis. Users become extremely violent.

The medical director of Honolulu's Castle Medical Center Alcohol and Addictions Program states that ice can be fatal, leading to strokes, heart attacks and pulmonary edema, which causes users to drown in their own bodily fluids. Since 1985, there have been 32 deaths in Honolulu attributed to ice.

One of the primary investigative efforts of DEA is the identification and destruction of clandestine drug laboratories that manufacture methamphetamine and other illicit drugs in the United States. We are currently experiencing an increase in the

number of such laboratories. In FY 81, we seized 197 clandestine laboratories, of which 100 were methamphetamine operations. By comparison, 810 clandestine laboratories were confiscated last year, 667 of which were manufacturing methamphetamine. And, although final figures are not in yet, preliminary statistics indicate that in FY 89 DEA has been responsible for the seizure of 722 clandestine laboratories, 575 of which were manufacturing methamphetamine.

Our clandestine laboratory seizure program is based on three measures: training, safety, and hazardous waste cleanup and disposal. DEA has conducted 23 clandestine laboratory enforcement training schools throughout the United States. We have instructed approximately 800 DEA agents and personnel from other federal as well as state and local agencies in effective enforcement procedures.

Realizing the enormous dangers inherent in our work, DEA emphasizes all aspects of safety in our program. Through our safety certification classes, we train, certify, and monitor our agents and chemists, as well as local and state law enforcement officers working in DEA task forces. DEA has sponsored 20 schools, training and equipping over 470 DEA agents and field chemists, as well as over 100 state and local law enforcement officials. Additionally, DEA has instructed seven Bureau of Justice Assistance safety schools, training over 230 state and local personnel.

The third phase of our program is hazardous waste cleanup and disposal. Clandestine laboratory sites are similar to uncontrolled waste sites or chemical emergency situations. Remedial actions, including immediate or planned removal, are necessary to prevent harm to the public health or the welfare of the environment.

Another way we are attacking the clandestine laboratory problem is through the Chemical Diversion and Trafficking Act of 1988. This legislation makes it increasingly more difficult for clandestine laboratory operators to obtain the essential chemicals necessary to produce methamphetamine and other illicit substances. The Act requires that records be kept on sales of listed chemicals and stipulates that these records must be made available for inspection by DEA investigators. These measures are resulting in the development of vital intelligence data on chemical diversion that is critical to drug enforcement investigations.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the National Institute on Drug Abuse is now supporting a long-held DEA position that domestically produced methamphetamine looms as a potential national drug crisis for the 1990's. What is unique about this illicit substance is that, unlike most other major illegal drugs in this country, methamphetamine is not produced, processed, or distributed from abroad. Rather, it is manufactured here in the United States. We are the source of

this problem, and therefore it is important that we take steps to address it. Toward that end, DEA is continuing to enhance and expand our programs aimed at targeting these domestic clandestine methamphetamine laboratories and disrupting their illicit activities.

I will be pleased at this time to answer any questions you may have.