

# Meth superlab

Contrary to popular belief, most meth users do not operate meth labs. An estimated 80 percent of the U.S. supply comes instead from organized drug cartels, which manufacture meth for national distribution in a small number of massive California "superlabs." Pioneered by Mexican drug runners in the early 1990s, these labs require enormous volumes of the essential chemicals ephedrine or pseudoephedrine. Traffickers extract these interchangeable ingredients from cough and cold pills sold on the black market.

## 1. Grind tablets

Tablets of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine are ground to a powder in a blender.

## 2. Mix with solvent

Ephedrine or pseudoephedrine adheres to the solvent, separating it from white tablet binder.

## 3. Filtering binder

The binder is removed with a filter. The remaining solvent is cooked away on low heat, leaving pure pseudoephedrine.

Acid Red phosphorus

"Bubbling 22"

Vent hose

Filter cloth

## 5. Filter out sludge

Red phosphorus sludge is filtered out using cloth bungeed over a barrel.

## 4. Add red phosphorus and acid

Mixed in on low heat, the pseudoephedrine changes to methamphetamine, but is too acidic.

## 6. Add caustic soda

Gives meth a base. This process creates intense heat, so ice is used to cool the reaction.

Caustic soda

Ice

## 7. Add Freon, separate liquid meth

The meth sticks to the Freon and settles to the bottom, where it is drained out using a spigot.

## 8. Bubble hydrogen chloride

The gas turns the meth into a salt, lowering its acidity. The meth is now consumable, but still wet.

Hydrogen chloride

Liquid meth

Liquid meth on bottom

## 9. Drying

The finished meth is poured onto a filter cloth and dried.

Filter cloth

## 10. Cutting

The dry meth is weighed, diluted with additives, and packaged.

## "BUBBLING 22"

At the center of the operation are four globe-shaped flasks on aluminum bases. These 22-liter glass balls with electric heaters are the superlab's signature feature. Each one sells for \$3,000 to \$4,000 on the street and will make 110,000 doses of meth. Many superlabs string together multiple "22s" for even bigger production.

