

## **Police Warn of Potential Increase in Ammonia Thefts.**

*- Sgt. I.C.Sanderson , RCMP Drug Awareness Service, Edmonton*

Police in Alberta are watching for an increase in anhydrous ammonia thefts. The reason is not based in agriculture, but the illegal manufacture of methamphetamine. Now that seeding is complete field applicators are being stored until next season and storage facilities are servicing their equipment in preparation for winter. Now is a good time to ensure that is protected from theft or damage that could be related to this new drug trend.

Methamphetamine is a powerful stimulant that is gaining in popularity in Alberta. D-methamphetamine, is made from ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, and is the most potent form of the drug. This new form of meth, was first seen in California in the early 1990's. Police in Northern Alberta have been dealing with a sharp increase in the illegal manufacturing and use of meth over the past six years. The majority of meth is produced by large "Super Labs" that can produce more than 15 kilograms of the drug in a single reaction. Small home labs generally produce around 30 grams or less per "cook." There are dozens of recipes that can be used to make meth in a simple "lab" using common household products and apparatus. The most common method currently in use in Alberta mixes chemicals such as phosphorus and iodine, to convert common cold medicine into this highly addictive drug.

But the times are changing and police are anticipating a rise in other methods used to make meth. As some of the chemicals used to make the drug become harder to get, other methods become more popular. One method, known as the "Birch" or "Nazi" method, uses anhydrous ammonia in the reaction process. Research from around the world shows that this meth recipe becomes very popular in agricultural areas due to the readily available supply of anhydrous ammonia. This trend results in significant increases in the theft of this fertilizer, from farms and agricultural supply businesses. Police are now warning suppliers and users of anhydrous ammonia of this potential increase in crime, in order to prevent the thefts. This subsequent use in clandestine labs is extremely dangerous. The resulting chemical hazards, crime and addiction issue that come with the use of the drug, pose a significant risk to communities.

### **How can anhydrous suppliers and users protect their product?**

Awareness of the issue by all stakeholders can be the best form of prevention. The proper securing of this common fertilizer both on and off the farm can significantly reduce the potential of theft or inadvertent release of the chemical. Anyone involved in the sale or use of anhydrous ammonia is encouraged to lock all valves and store application equipment in well lit or highly visible areas. Regular inspection of storage tanks and applicators will ensure that security measures have not been tampered with. Perimeter alarm systems that monitor storage yards can be a relatively inexpensive way to protect equipment and product. Video surveillance can assist in preventing theft, but also assist investigators when thefts do occur. Any suspicious activity, attempted or actual thefts of anhydrous ammonia should be reported to Police as soon as possible.

### **Why is it important to report this activity to police?**

Commodities such as anhydrous ammonia could be targeted by many different criminal groups. In the wrong hands or used improperly they can pose a significant risk to individuals and communities. In order to determine the extent of criminal activity relating to anhydrous thefts, it is important have all possible information to aid in strategic planning and enforcement targeting.

### **How can Rural Crime Watch assist in this preventive strategy?**

Rural Crime Watch is a valued partner in prevention and can play an integral part in awareness and information gathering. At this point in time it is unclear how much anhydrous ammonia is being diverted into the illicit production of methamphetamine. Why anyone would steal, anhydrous ammonia is puzzling to many. Small thefts may not be detected as they are not likely to be obvious. Such thefts can easily be explained as human error such as not closing a valve tightly. Simply put, the theft of anhydrous goes relatively unreported to police. There is evidence to suggest that anhydrous ammonia is being diverted to methamphetamine production, it is not known how much of this activity does occur. Police fully expect that it will certainly rise in the future, should it go unaddressed. Many jurisdictions in the United States report such thefts as an epidemic in agricultural communities.

Anhydrous thefts can be very obvious, such as the theft of delivery tanks or field applicators. Others can be less obvious, if the material is released from tanks into another storage container such as a propane bottle or thermos jug. RCW can play an important role in preventing theft, identifying persons responsible for this crime, determining the size the problem or to give an early warning of an increase should it occur.

This preventive initiative fits perfectly into the mandate of Rural Crime Watch (RCW). The members of each RCW association can play an active role in making farmers and suppliers in their area, aware of this problem. They are also an excellent resource to transmit prevention information while encouraging the reporting of suspicious activity and thefts. In addition, every RCW member is another set of eyes that can observe and report suspicious activities near anhydrous storage tanks. RCW Associations working with their local Detachments, can be partners in developing a local prevention strategy for their communities. For more information, please contact the RCMP Drug Awareness Service.

Calgary (403)230-6533 Or Edmonton (780) 412-5461

## **To All Detachments 'K' Division**

Currently the use of anhydrous ammonia in the production of Methamphetamine is very low in Alberta. The trends for Methamphetamine observed in other jurisdictions suggest that could change, particularly with the proliferation of home based labs. In addition, the wide spread availability of anhydrous ammonia in the province increases that risk. In order to develop intelligence relating to the use of anhydrous ammonia in the production of Methamphetamine, an initiative has been developed to raise awareness in the agricultural community and seek the assistance of Rural Crime Watch.

Through a media strategy and through Rural Crime Watch, we will be raising awareness to the potential of this issue and encouraging action in the following areas:

- 1) Better security of anhydrous ammonia storage and retail facilities.
- 2) Increased awareness and reporting from retailers, transport companies and farmers of suspicious activity, attempted or actual thefts of anhydrous ammonia.
- 3) Engagement of Rural Crime Watch associations and their members to assist Detachments in doing awareness and increased monitoring of storage facilities.
- 4) Increased reporting to NCDB by departments on complaints received relating to anhydrous ammonia.

## **How can Detachments participate in this initiative?**

There will be a province wide media release coordinated by Division Media Relations. The contents of the media package will be available to all units who may wish to do local media stories. The Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association will be circulating this same package to their members. They are being encouraged to work with their local Detachments to contact local anhydrous suppliers with information on securing facilities and inventory protection. All stakeholders are being encouraged to report suspicious activity relating to or thefts of anhydrous ammonia. All that will be further required of the Detachment is to create a file with the information and forward same to NCDB.

## **If it is not a big problem, why should we bother?**

There are a number of public safety issues that relate to anhydrous ammonia. It has been the experience in other jurisdictions that when the "Birch" or "Nazi" method becomes prevalent, it grows very quickly. By developing a base-line of intelligence in this area now, the monitoring of this trend will be enhanced. This will also assist dedicated investigators such as the Clandestine Lab Enforcement Response Team and Chemical Diversion Program to better target high risk areas.

## **What is considered suspicious activity?**

There are many indicators to watch for:

- Suspicious persons checking or surveilling storage facilities or field applicators.
- Attempted break-ins to storage facilities.
- Tampered valves on storage tanks or field applicators
- Attempted thefts of field applicators
- Discarded insulated jugs that have been used to store anhydrous ammonia
- Discarded propane tanks that have a blue corrosion on brass fittings.

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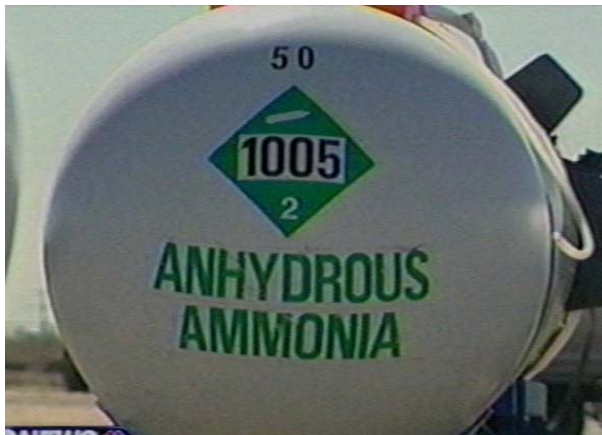
For further information contact:

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Anhydrous Ammonia Field applicator tank



Markings on anhydrous field applicator



Blue corrosion on brass fittings exposed to anhydrous ammonia