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Meth use closer to home than you think

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You've seen the commercials, the ones with teenagers who end up destroying their lives because of meth, the commercials that show people trying meth for the first time, convinced they won't turn out like that guy. It's just a commercial, right?

Wrong. Put your ignorance aside and think about how much of a problem meth is. Think about how many lives it has destroyed and how prevalent its use is in our state.

According to the Hawaii Meth Project, \$43 million is spent on meth-related emergency room visits in Hawaii. Our state ranks fourth highest for meth-related drug offenses and meth use amongst Hawaii's 10th graders have increased by 87 percent.

What's more is that you don't have to actively be doing meth to reap its unhealthy effects. Meth labs contain chemical vapors that can cause health problems as well as death. If the lab is cleaned up, the residues still pose risks - meaning, unless someone is caught and arrested in a space with meth, hazardous exposure can remain undiscovered by unsuspecting home buyers and neighbors, as well as tourists in hotel rooms.

Keep in mind that for every pound of meth produced, approximately five pounds of toxic waste (are) generated, according to Hawaii Meth Project's web site.

There are many products used to make methamphetamine. In fact, most of these can be found around your house and local stores. The base chemicals, ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, are common in over-the-counter medicines. Some additional ingredients used are acetone from nail polish remover, hydrochloric acid found in pool chemicals, lithium from batteries, sulfuric acid from drain cleaners and anhydrous ammonia in fertilizer.

The Hawaii Meth Project lists startling facts concerning the vapors from cooking meth: they can become extremely unstable, creating explosions capable of burning and killing.

How does this affect your health? Well, you wouldn't eat fertilizer and batteries, would you?

You don't have to be exposed to a contaminated area for a long time to acquire adverse symptoms. According to CBS News, even short-term exposure to vapors and residue where the drug is smoked or cooked can cause eye and skin irritation, vomiting, rashes, asthma problems and other respiratory issues.

Cleaning up the contaminated area is really the only solution, but it's also an expensive one estimated at about \$2,000 to \$20,000. Keeping in mind our economy, who really has that much money to spare?

Being aware of the problem can help to fight the battle. If you're looking for a place to stay or if you happen to know a personal case of meth use, it all comes down to this: Meth affects the pleasure centers of the brain. The Hawaii Meth Project states that it is considered even more addictive than heroin. A meth user will have intense cravings for the drug and may do anything, such as having sex or using violence, to get more.

Many of us understand that drugs are bad, but at the same time, we don't truly take the message to heart. We may feel drugs do not affect us, because we don't personally do them, but in reality, there is no escape. We are all affected.