

The Gazette-Enterprise

City employees learn dangers of meth labs

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The Gazette-Enterprise

Published May 17, 2007

SEGUIN — If a so-called “cook” was manufacturing methamphetamine here in Seguin, think that wouldn’t be your problem, even if you owned the place?

Just get the crooks out, slap on a fresh coat of paint, and no problem? Wrong, maybe even dead wrong.

Kirk Flippin, a New Braunfels man who owns a company called Texas Decon and Seguin Narcotics Investigator Steve Alyea were among the speakers Wednesday at a day-long seminar hosted by the Seguin Police Department, “Clandestine Drug Lab Decontamination.” The event was for firefighters, social services and medical professionals and police officers from around the region. Well over 100 attended.

Those who made presentations at the seminar included officials with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and an Idaho-based national firm, Meth Lab Cleanup, LLC, which included talks on training, safety, identification and chemical disposal. In Seguin alone last year — not counting the rest of the county outside the city limits, five illegal methamphetamine manufacturing facilities were shut down and their operators either put in prison or are now awaiting trial.

“It’s a huge problem,” said Alyea, whose job is to investigate drug crime as part of the narcotics unit operated jointly by the SPD and the Guadalupe County Sheriff’s Office. “Is it as big as heroin or cocaine? Maybe not. But if left unattended, it will be.”

Most people today, Alyea said, understand that methamphetamine is an illegal drug and that it’s available here.

“They don’t know how it got here or where it came from or that some of it came from clandestine labs right here in Seguin,” Alyea said. “They don’t know that.”

A meth lab — which can operate on a kitchen

stove or even a camper's cooking stove — is a very hazardous site. Chemicals that are used in or are byproducts of making methamphetamine are dangerous and will stay in a building for years unless properly removed.

And the stakes are enormous, the officer said.

“If you don't clean it up, at the very least you're going to have health issues,” Alyea said. “The long-term health issue is cancer.”

A testing regimen to find chemical contamination in a home can cost from about \$400 to \$700. A full decontamination can run 10 times that or more depending on the level of damage or contamination found. But it must be done, said Bill Coye, owner of Oklahoma-based Apex Bioclean. One home Coye tested 14 years after a meth lab had been found and shut down inside remained dangerously toxic. “That property had been sold twice, repainted and remodeled two times and it still (was contaminated),” Coye said. While that might not be moral or ethical in Texas, it's not illegal because, said Joe Mazzuca of Meth Lab Cleanup LLC, there is no law here pertaining to such standards for contamination.

Flippin said a bill now before the state senate would require sellers of homes to disclose if they had ever been used as clandestine drug labs. He hopes it will pass, but he'd also like to see a bill that requires owners of such properties to ensure they are properly cleaned up.

Flippin's company does that kind of work, but that's beside the point, he said.

"Surely, I'd like to do the work," Flippin said. "But I don't care whether I do it or not so long as it gets done. Our children should not be exposed to these chemicals."

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