

Brevard County Protocol for Drug Endangered Children (DEC)

1. Joint Investigation

It is recommended that Drug Endangered Children (DEC) investigations be worked jointly by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the appropriate law enforcement (LE) agency having criminal jurisdiction, the appropriate emergency medical agency (Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Fire Department), and follow-up treatment agencies. All agencies will share information, and respond in a coordinated, collaborative effort throughout the investigative process.

a. Known/suspected Clandestine Drug Laboratory

1. **When DCF receives the initial DEC report**, they will notify the appropriate law enforcement agency and provide them with all known information. Information should include all prior DCF reports on members of the household. Law enforcement should request a call history of the current address and any available criminal intelligence, and share all information with the responding DCF investigator. LE should notify EMS or the Fire Department to be available to respond to any emergency situation that may arise.
2. **When law enforcement receives the initial DEC report**, they will notify the Abuse Registry/Hotline and request an immediate DCF response. This call may be expedited by calling the dedicated law enforcement line 1-866-LEABUSE. Law enforcement should request a call history of the current address, coordinate with their Narcotics Unit (if available) for any prior narcotics intelligence, and share all pertinent information with the DCF investigator. The DCF investigator should provide law enforcement with all current and previous DCF report information on members of the household. (Law enforcement should make initial contact at the residence, ensuring safety and security of the law enforcement operation)
3. **If possible** and prior to making initial contact, the law enforcement and DCF representatives should develop an investigative plan based on all available information. Once it is determined a DEC situation exists, law enforcement will notify and coordinate with EMS and the Fire Department. When appropriate and without compromising the criminal investigation, EMS and Fire Department personnel should be ready to immediately respond to the site of drug activity. This is important because of the hazardous nature of these drug sites which may endanger investigators, perpetrators or victims.

b. Unknown Clandestine Drug Site Discovered on Unrelated Complaint

1. **DCF Discovery** - If children are present, children should be taken to a safe environment outside the home if possible. Law enforcement should be notified immediately and the home should not be re-entered.
2. **Law enforcement Discovery** - all individuals should be immediately removed from the home and the crime scene should be secured. The appropriate narcotics unit, medical personnel, and the DCF Abuse Hotline should be notified, requesting an immediate response from DCF Investigations.

2. Immediate procedures at the scene of clandestine drug sites or when chemicals or paraphernalia are present.

It is recommended that when children are found at the scene, or are known to have been present at the scene of a suspected or working clandestine drug site that the following steps are taken for their safety and protection, as well as the safety and protection of responding investigative/medical personnel:

- a. All investigative/medical personnel responding at the scene of a clandestine drug site should follow their agency safety procedures when dealing with or coming in contact with hazardous materials (HAZMAT).
- b. All persons inside the home should be immediately removed. Law enforcement should take the lead in removing occupants from the home, ensuring their safety while preserving the integrity of the crime scene.
- c. Appropriate emergency personnel (EMS and Fire Department) should be notified by law enforcement and respond to the scene. Emergency personnel may be needed to respond to chemical hazards, explosions or fires caused by the hazardous nature of drug sites. They also may be needed to respond to medical emergencies of victims, perpetrators or investigators.
- d. Law enforcement should immediately notify their Narcotics Unit. If the responding law enforcement agency does not have an internal Narcotics Unit, then they should notify the appropriate law enforcement agency for assistance.

3. DCF Investigation (On-Scene)

- a. Children located at the scene, or known to have been present at the scene of a clandestine drug site should be placed in protective custody by DCF.
- b. To minimize contamination, no personal items should be removed from the scene. If cleared medically by EMS at the scene, DCF will transport the children

to the designated fire station for decontamination to include a shower and change of clothes. Every precaution should be taken to minimize exposure to contaminated materials. Disposable seat covers should be utilized for transport of the children and their clothing should be bagged for decontamination following removal. DCF and Fire Department personnel should coordinate their activities for decontaminating children. Whenever possible, a witness should be present during this process.

- c. Children, if age appropriate, should be interviewed regarding their home situation and any information they may have regarding the drug lab. Relevant information should be provided to the appropriate LE agency. DCF will help the child understand why he is being separated from his parents and ensure ongoing services will be provided to the child and his parents. Forensic interviews should be conducted on all verbal children. This may be performed by LE or CPT. The need for forensic interviews will be determined in collaboration with LE, CPT, and DCF, subsequent to the field interview conducted by LE and/or DCF. Forensic interviews should be conducted at the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) or similar facility.
- d. The child's medical history should be obtained from the caregiver at the scene if possible. CPT should be contacted to arrange for forensic medical evaluation.
- e. Parents and other caregivers should be interviewed regarding relatives and social history at the time the children are removed. DCF will need to obtain information for the removal packet, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) , Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), etc. Any other interviews with the parents or caregivers should be coordinated with the involved law enforcement agency.
- f. Copies of photographs, evidence sheets and law enforcement reports should be obtained in order to ensure that dependency action can be documented for judicial purposes.

4. **Law Enforcement Investigation (On-Scene)**

- a. Photographs should be taken if children are present or if evidence exists that children resided at the location. Photographs should include:
 - 1. Location of the incident.
 - 2. Interior living conditions of the home.
 - 3. Children's ability to access drugs, chemicals, drug paraphernalia and by-products. Measurements of furniture height should be taken into consideration based on the age and developmental stages of the children.
 - 4. Play area/yard where the children may have been exposed.
 - 5. Children's bedroom or sleeping area, including evidence of attempts to reduce exposure to chemical residue such as blocked air vents, etc.

6. Conditions of the bathroom(s).
 7. Food supply in kitchen cabinets, pantry, refrigerator or freezer.
 8. Proximity of food to chemicals, paraphernalia, fire and chemical hazards, and where discovered.
 9. Drug lab components, associated chemicals, paraphernalia, fire and chemical hazards, and locations discovered.
 10. All evidence collected by law enforcement personnel.
 11. Physical condition of the children and all other occupants of the residence.
 12. Indication of any fires caused as a result of the clandestine production of drugs within the residence.
 13. All injection sites or other methods of intake of the drug.
- b. Law Enforcement personnel will be responsible for the collection and preservation of all evidence according to Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Florida Department of Law Enforcement evidence collection protocol.
- c. Law Enforcement personnel will document and attempt to identify all chemicals located at the residence and provide the information to DCF and medical personnel. If large quantities of chemicals are present in the form of 55-gallon drums or 5-gallon buckets, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Division of Law Enforcement should be notified via the state warning point (1-800-320-0519). An on-call agent supervisor will contact the reporting officer or agent to discuss the potential environmental impact.
- d. Law Enforcement will conduct criminal interviews with individuals present (suspects, witnesses and children):
1. Field interviews of the children may be performed by LE and/or DCF.
 2. Forensic interviews with children should be conducted at a Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) or similar type facility. They will be conducted by either CPT or LE. (Refer to attached interview guidelines.)
 3. Videotaped interviews of the children should be conducted whenever possible, utilizing age appropriate methods.
 4. Interviews with parents and witnesses should include targeted questions which address their knowledge of the dangers to children, admissions that children were near lab hazards, or disregard for the danger posed to children, the kinds of chemicals used in production, number of times manufactured, and frequency of occurrences in the presence of the children.
- e. Reports/Documentation:
1. All occupants in the home (full-time and part-time residents) should be identified and included in the report.
 2. Agency reports regarding drug exposure (manufacture, sale and /or possession) should be documented.

3. A listing of all chemicals discovered at the site should be immediately reported and provided to DCF for their dependency action.
4. Upon discovery and verification of a drug lab at a residence, it is strongly recommended that law enforcement notify the following agencies:
 - a. Health Department (community safety)
 - b. Property Owner (responsible for HAZMAT clean-up)
 - c. Property Appraisal Office (require disclosure to future residents)
- f. The Drug Enforcement Agency will be responsible for the coordination of the removal of the chemicals and by-products at the drug site.

5. Medical Assessment of Children Removed from Locations in which Methamphetamine Manufacture is Suspected

- a. Initial medical assessment will be provided by emergency medical services (EMS) at the scene. Children should be evaluated at the emergency department where a urine drug screen should be collected to identify any level of exposure.
- b. If significant problems are identified, EMS should transport child to the hospital emergency department.
- c. If no emergency problems are noted or EMS is not on the scene, DCF will transport child to the designated Fire Department for decontamination as soon as possible. Entire body and hair should be washed with soap and water and the child should be dressed in clean clothes.
- d. Subsequent to the decontamination, DCF will transport the child to the emergency department for evaluation and collection of urine drug screen. DCF should proceed with placement after children have been decontaminated and medically cleared in the emergency department.
- e. Disposable seat covers should be used by DCF personnel if child is transported before decontamination.
- f. All DEC children should be referred to CPT. Determination will then be made as to the appropriate CPT services to be utilized. CPT will provide necessary services depending on the circumstances of each case. This could include medical examination (if there are additional allegations of abuse and neglect), medical consultation, and/or forensic interview.
- g. All children should be seen by their primary care provider within 72 hours after placement as with all children in DCF custody.
- h. CPT will provide information regarding drug endangered children to the physician who will be providing primary care for the child including:
 1. Consideration of laboratory evaluation including chemistry panel and complete blood count
 2. Need for developmental evaluation
 3. Need for referral to dentist
 4. Need for mental health services

6. Child Protection Team (CPT)

- a. The role of the CPT is to assist in child abuse investigations.
- b. All drug endangered children should be referred to CPT.
- c. CPT will provide necessary services depending on the circumstances of each case. This may include medical examination (if there are additional allegations of abuse and/or neglect), medical consultation, and/or forensic interview.
- d. CPT will provide follow-up case management to include referral to Early Steps or Child Find for developmental services and referral for mental health services.
- e. CPT will provide information regarding the drug-endangered child to the physician who will be providing primary care for the child.
- f. CPT will arrange multidisciplinary staffings as necessary.

7. Fire Department/EMS

- a. Fire rescue personnel are an essential part of the response to drug sites because of the hazardous nature of these sites resulting from the presence of volatile chemicals and the potential for fire and explosions. They are also vital first responders to provide emergency medical care to investigators, victims or perpetrators.
- b. Emergency Medical Services personnel will provide initial medical evaluation of children found at drug sites. They will transport children to an emergency department for treatment when indicated.
- c. They will provide support to law enforcement agencies and DCF representatives at the site in any way possible based on the capabilities of units, equipment, and personnel currently on the scene of the incident.
- d. Fire Department personnel will provide decontamination support to children removed from drug sites at designated fire stations.
- e. Fire Department and EMS reports, including identification of responding personnel, should be made available by appropriate request and forwarded to the requesting agency.

8. Safety Procedures

We are facing an unprecedented epidemic of clandestine drug sites in the United States. Seizures of drug sites continue to rise putting police and first responders at risks for a variety of hazards. First responders and children residing in the home are at risk for exposures to the chemical hazards, fire, explosion, and safety hazards inherent with clandestine manufacturing of methamphetamines. Responding investigative, and medical personnel should follow their agency safety procedures and corresponding OSHA requirements.

9. Team Coordination /Review

There are several agencies and organizations that participate in the DEC protocol. First responders to an investigation scene include law enforcement, DCF

investigators, EMS personnel, Fire Department personnel, and HAZMAT teams. It is essential that all agencies work together, share information, and respond in a coordinated, collaborative effort. In general, law enforcement should take the lead role at the scene. Law enforcement should be responsible for securing the scene and conducting the criminal investigation. Whenever children are found at the scene or are suspected of exposure to toxic chemicals, DCF should be notified and children should be taken into protective custody. EMS should perform a field medical assessment and if required, transport them to nearest medical facility. HAZMAT teams should be responsible for removal of toxic waste.

10. Training

As part of this protocol, it is planned that a formal Brevard County Protocol for Drug Endangered children training program will be formulated. Presenters of this training program will be comprised of Law Enforcement, Department of Children and Families, the Child Protection Team, and Emergency Services/Fire Department personnel. It is anticipated that once the training program has been finalized it will be presented to family provider agencies such as (but not limited to) Community Based Care staff, law enforcement personnel, Department of Children and Families personnel, in home service providers, etc.

Signed by the following:

- Mr. Norman Wolfinger, Brevard County State Attorney
- Sheriff Jack Parker, Brevard County Sheriff's Office
- William Farmer, Chief, Brevard County Fire Rescue
- Alan Abramowitz, District Administrator, District 7, Department of Children and Families
- Dr. Mary E. Stockett, Director, Child Protection Team of Brevard
- Charles L. Biehl, Director, Child Protection Team of Brevard
- Donald Carey, Chief, Melbourne Police Department
- Bill Berger, Chief, Palm Bay Police Department
- John C. Shockey, Chief, Rockledge Police Department
- Phil Ludos, Chief, Cocoa Police Department
- Brian Holmes, Chief, Cocoa Beach Police Department
- Lionel Cote, Chief, Satellite Beach Police Department
- Robert Sullivan, Chief, Indian Harbour Beach Police Department
- Troy Morris, Chief, Indian River Police Department
- Brian Lock, Chief, West Melbourne Police Department
- Dan Duncan, Acting Chief, Melbourne Beach Police Department
- Jack King, Chief, Melbourne Village Police Department