

Residents charged as part of largest meth bust in Ontario history

By **Angela Gismondi**

Five people are facing numerous charges following the largest clandestine drug lab, methamphetamine and chemical seizure in Ontario's history.

At a news conference held in Vaughan on Thursday, members of the Asian Organized Crime Task Force (AOCTF) revealed details of a lengthy joint police investigation into a syndicate involving large-scale production of methamphetamine.

AOCTF is a joint forces operation comprised of members of the Toronto Police Service, OPP, RCMP, York Regional Police, Peel Regional Police, and the Canada Border Service Agency (CBSA). The value of all illegal drugs seized is about \$5 million, with a street value of about \$40 million.

In late July, police executed seven search warrants at residences and businesses across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and two search warrants in the Campbellford and Warkworth areas, the AOCTF reported at the press conference.

As a result, three clandestine drug production labs were dismantled in the GTA. One chemical lab in Warkworth – one of the largest methamphetamine labs ever discovered in Ontario – was used to produce raw methamphetamine. Two other labs were where the methamphetamine was mixed into powder and pressed into pill form for distribution.

At a pill pressing lab located in Campbellford, more than 110 kilograms of pure methamphetamine was seized. That site was found to have been guarded with a bear trap shrouded by leaves. A second pill-pressing lab was dismantled in Aurora. A storage locker in Markham was also searched, resulting in the seizure of 3,400 kilograms of chemicals used in the production of methamphetamine.

In total, police seized 120 kilograms of pure methamphetamine (equivalent to approximately four million pills); 110,483 meth pills; 14 kilograms of meth powder (ready to be pressed into pills); five motor vehicles and \$81,000 in cash.

Deputy Commissioner Scott Tod, of OPP Investigations and Organized Crime, explained the successful cooperation of all the different groups led to the dismantling of the labs and the arrest of five people.

"It is in the name of preserving community safety that we are all here together," said Tod. "Illegal drugs and clandestine labs are among the top priority (of the Asian Organized Crime Task Force). We are very proud of our work to bring these people to justice."

"Clandestine drug labs, and the drugs they manufacture, have a toxic and destructive impact on the lives of people, their communities, and the environment. They can also lead to a wide spectrum of violent acts and property crimes involving criminal organizations."

Tod also pointed out the potential environmental dangers caused by illegal drug production operations.

The producers are likely to illegally dispose of the chemicals they use near the site, potentially contaminating the environment in the area. For example, the production of one pound of methamphetamine results in about six pounds of toxic chemical waste. This toxic waste is usually disposed of through careless dumping, resulting in potential contamination of nearby land and waterways.

The task force also reported that most of the drugs being produced at the four locations were destined to go outside of Canada and that loopholes in Canadian legislation makes it easier for criminals to produce large amounts of drugs in the country.

The size of the labs in Canada is of particular concern. Canada has some of the largest labs in the world.

Chief Superintendent Mike Armstrong, Commander, OPP Organized Crime Enforcement Bureau, reported the chemical materials

into themselves are not necessarily illegal to import into Canada nor are they all currently named as controlled substances under the Controlled Drug and Substances Act.

Clandestine drug labs can be found anywhere both urban and rural areas are not immune, said Armstrong. The Organized Crime Enforcement Bureau will continue to target these labs as well as the criminal organizations that operate them. We want to make sure Ontario remains safe.

Det. Sgt. Jim Walker of the OPP OCEB Drug Enforcement, Clan Lab Investigation Response Team Coordinator, who was involved in the investigation, said the buildings don't look different or suspicious.

Neighbours wouldn't take a second glance at it, said Walker, adding that it was the largest in terms of finished seized product that he's ever come across. We were surprised at the volume.

The individuals who are producing these illegal drugs are not certified chemists, which makes for a very hazardous and volatile situation, he said.

For those who are thinking about using the drug, Walker said to look online and see what meth can do to you.

Five people have been charged with various drug-related offences including three individuals from York Region. A 49-year-old from Aurora has been charged with possession of a controlled substance for the purpose of trafficking, production of a controlled substance and trafficking in a controlled substance.

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A 28-year-old of Markham has been charged with possession of items used in the production of methamphetamine.

A 55-year-old and a 39-year-old from Campbellford were charged with possession of a controlled substance for the purpose of trafficking, production of a controlled substance and setting a trap with intent to cause bodily harm. The 55-year-old was also charged with six counts of trafficking in a controlled substance.