

TOPIC No. 15
DETECTION AND DISMANTLING OF CLANDESTINE LABORATORIES
PRODUCING ILLICIT DRUGS; INVESTIGATIONS TO IDENTIFY
SOURCES OF SUPPLY OF PRECURSOR CHEMICALS TO SUCH
LABORATORIES

DURATION:	1 HOUR
SUGGESTED METHOD:	LECTURE
TRAINING AIDS:	OHP, POWERPOINT PRESENTATION
AIM OF THE SESSION:	

The session aims at preparing the participants for raids on illicit laboratories by instructing them on the sources from which they can obtain intelligence about existence of a laboratory; how they should plan and carry out raids without endangering their physical safety; and how they should dismantle the laboratory, collect evidence and take follow up action.

OBJECTIVE OF THE SESSION:

At the end of the session, the participants would be in a position to plan and carry out successful raids over illicit laboratories.

POINTS TO BE COVERED:

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Illicit laboratories are the final destinations for diverted precursors. It is here that precursors diverted from licit trade are used in the manufacture of the drugs of abuse.
2. The ultimate objective of all anti-diversion strategies and efforts undertaken world over by the governments and their enforcement authorities is to ensure that the chemicals necessary for manufacture of drugs do not reach illicit laboratories.
3. Therefore, detection and dismantling of these laboratories is the last attempt on the part of enforcement officers to stop drugs from coming into existence and is essential to tackle supply side of drug problem.
4. During last two decades, existence of illicit laboratories in SAARC region has been frequently noticed.
5. Drug law enforcement officers of the SAARC countries, therefore, need to equip themselves with expertise to detect and dismantle these laboratories.
6. Locating illicit laboratories and then busting them is a challenging task for the drug law enforcement officers.

7. Before we discuss detection/dismantling of laboratories, it would be appropriate that enforcement officers are sensitised on various kinds of risks, which they may face and, therefore, should guard against while raiding illicit laboratories.

RISK FACTORS INVOLVED IN RAIDS ON LABORATORIES

The risk factors involved in laboratory raids are listed below -

1. Experience shows that laboratories are very often guarded by armed criminals, who also maintain counter-surveillance. Raiding parties run risk of being attacked by these criminals
2. In Western countries, laboratories have been found protected by booby traps, dogs, high voltage locked doors, remote control video cameras. Possibility of such protective measures being taken by criminals in the SAARC region cannot be ruled out and, therefore, should be kept in view while planning raids on laboratories.
3. While handling the chemicals or taking out samples, the enforcement officers may encounter a number of dangerous situations because of the very nature of the chemicals. For instance -
 - Officers, if not protected by masks, may inhale high dosages of toxic gases.
 - If their skin comes in contact with some of these chemicals, it can cause burns.
 - Inhalation of fumes of some of the chemicals or the penetration of chemicals into skin can cause cancers.
 - Spilling of different chemicals during sampling may lead to release of toxic or explosive gases.
 - Absence of separate stacking of incompatible chemicals in illicit laboratories may even cause explosions if such chemicals get mixed up during the raid.
 - Opening of barrels of chemicals may release concentrated gases which may damage skin, eyes etc.
 - Because of very nature of operations, illicit laboratories generally do not let containers of chemicals carry labels. As the officers may not know the properties of the un-identified chemicals, mishaps may occur while handling them.
 - Chemicals may lead to fires/explosives during raids. Raiding party should have at least one member who is qualified to handle these chemicals.
 - Very often the illicit laboratories have slippery floors.
 - Illicit laboratories use old and unreliable regulators or cylinders.
 - Criminals are wont to throw chemicals at the raiding party.

- Officers may receive electric shocks because of the use of faulty electric equipment.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION/INTELLIGENCE

Some of the sources of information, which may lead to detection of laboratories may be as under:

1. Informants.
2. Previous investigations or investigations against other gangs can also provide clue about the illicit laboratories.
3. Information may also be received from other agencies.
4. Controlled delivery of precursors under diversion can also lead to unearthing of clandestine laboratories.
5. Undercover operations if permissible under the law could be a very good way of identifying illicit laboratories.
6. Enforcement authorities' contacts with the people supplying glass ware for laboratories, chemicals and tableting machines may result in a tip off leading to location of laboratories.
7. Surveillance over suspects can also help in locating a clandestine laboratory.
8. Interception of communication/wire taping can be a very useful tool for identification of illicit laboratories.
9. Watch over suspect premises could also help notice certain unusual behaviour on the part of occupants or such activities which may be sure indicators for existence of a laboratory.
10. Garbage consisting of empty bottles carrying labels of the precursors in villages could be a give away for the existence of laboratory somewhere nearby.
11. Authorities may also get the samples of sewage water of the suspect premises tested to confirm suspicion about a laboratory working inside.

PLANNING A RAID ON ILLICIT LABORATORY

Planning of raids would require following actions:

1. Assessment of risk factors
 - What is the best way of approaching the premises where laboratory is functioning?
 - What would be the appropriate time for starting the raid?
 - Is resistance or violence expected from the operators of the laboratory and if so what precautions should be taken in advance to meet the same?
 - What chemicals are likely to be found and what kind of handling they require?
2. Assessment of logistics
 - A control centre needs to be established which may co-ordinate

- various activities and can rush reinforcements if so required.
- Place of assembling for vehicles/staff should be decided.
- Who would be the leader of the raiding party should be decided.
- Different functions to different members of the raiding party should be assigned in advance to avoid confusion on the spot.
- Requirements of skilled scientists/chemists be assessed and provided for.
- Requirements of the equipments should be pre-determined.
- Precautions required to be taken to safeguard against the hazardous effects of chemicals should be taken. A first aid kit and prior briefing on safety procedures are a must for any such raid.
- Provision for containers for samples should be made in advance.
- Requirements of transportation of seized chemicals, drugs and laboratory apparatus should be assessed and necessary provision made therefor.
- Appropriate action is required to be taken to manage the risk within the laboratory during the raid. Provision for protective clothing/equipment should be made. Participating officers need to be briefed that -
 - Chemicals would be handled by those who are competent to do so.
 - No smoking, drinking or eating should be permitted inside laboratory.
 - Officers while inside laboratory should not touch their eyes, mouth, nose.
 - Chemicals should not be touched.
 - If any adverse effect of chemical is noticed on a member of the raiding party, he should be removed from the spot, first aid given and proper medical attendance should be provided to him promptly.
 - Hands must be washed properly after leaving the laboratory.
 - All windows and doors of the laboratory should be kept open during the raid.
 - Equipment that may cause fire/explosion due to the flammable gases should not be allowed inside the laboratory.
 - Appropriate fire extinguishers should be kept handy.

ENTRY OF OFFICERS INTO THE LABORATORY

1. Assessment about number of people inside the laboratory, likely obstacles.
2. Removal of obstacles/taking control over the people inside the laboratory.
3. The officers who possess reliable knowledge on the properties of the chemicals should, first of all, take stock of the situation inside.
4. Precautionary measures such as removing possible causes of fire/explosions, ensuring proper ventilation, deciding if electricity source is to be switched off and finding whether escape route is available if some emergency arises to be taken.

5. Production process, if on, should be stopped.

COLLECTION OF EVIDENCE DURING RAID ON ILLICIT LABORATORY

Following actions should be taken in this regard -

- Preparation of the recovery memo (record of seizure), which should clearly describe the premises, location and details of the apparatus therein, chemicals found inside and process of manufacture being carried out.
- Photographs/video graph may also be taken.
- Laboratory equipment, tableting machines, chemicals along with containers and other items of evidence should be named, numbered and inventorised. The list should relate it to the description given in recovery memo and be annexed to it.
- The original make and numbers of equipment and apparatus be clearly indicated in the list so that they can be co-related to the supplier during follow up investigations.
- Samples should be taken from all drugs, chemicals and products whether intermediate or final found in the laboratory as per the prescribed procedure.
- Attempt should be made to collect all kinds of evidence.
- Fingerprints may also be lifted from equipments, barrels etc.
- Belongings such as shoes, clothes, gloves and safety masks of the persons working in the laboratory may also be seized for chemical analysis.
- Stamps used in the tableting machines should be taken over.

DISMANTLING OF THE LABORATORY

1. The equipment should be carefully unfastened/unhooked.
2. Chemicals, intermediates and final products should be properly packed preferably under supervision of a chemist.
3. All the above should be carefully transported to the warehouse/godown of the enforcement agency.

FOLLOW UP ACTION

1. A successful raid on a laboratory may provide a wealth of information on
 - (i) persons actively involved in running the laboratories,
 - (ii) other persons connected with the laboratory,
 - (iii) source of the precursor chemicals,
 - (iv) source of the drug that is refined, and
 - (v) buyers and final destinations of the final product of the laboratory.
2. The officers should, therefore, without loss of time subject the persons found in laboratory to intensive interrogation.
3. Information gathered during the raid and obtained through interrogation

- should be verified.
4. Supplier of the equipment, chemicals etc should be questioned and, if the law so requires, appropriate action initiated against them.
 5. Immediate follow up searches of the residential/office of these persons can also provide telephone numbers in the telephone diaries, an intelligent analysis of which coupled with well-focussed questioning of these persons can lead to the sources of the chemicals.
 6. Very often, traffickers maintain some private accounts, often in a coded manner. Intelligent questioning of the persons involved may help decipher these codes, thereby enabling the enforcement officers to reach the supply sources of the chemicals.