

Police Raid Suspected Drug Laboratory

BY KHUON NARIM
AND SIMON LEWIS
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

PHNOM SRUOCH DISTRICT, Kompong Speu province - Military police raided a suspected large-scale drug lab in Kompong Speu province on Monday night, but found no drugs and made no arrests.

Provincial military police raided the site, ostensibly a pig farm, in Phnom Sruoch district's O commune after villagers complained last week of a strong smell coming from the area, said Chan Da, deputy provincial military police commander.

Traces of acids, but no drugs or large quantities of precursor chemicals, were found on the farm, he said.

"We have not yet identified the specific substances, because experts from the ministry will test it," he said. "All of the equipment we found can produce poison or drugs."

At the 4-hectare farm yesterday, dozens of barrels lay around pig pens, and police had assembled a collection of equipment: waterproof boots, gas-masks, cooking pots and Chinese-made machines to test for acidity. Despite a sign reading "Pig Farm," no pigs were found. A powerful odor reminiscent of acetone lingered in the air.

Interior Ministry and National Authority for Combating Drugs (NACD) officials took samples of residues left in the equipment.

Dr. Meas Vyrieth, deputy secretary-general of the NACD, said that as well as acid, small amounts of alkaline chemicals were found at the Kompong Speu site.

"We found base and acid and we suspect they poured it into a

Continued on page 2

Drug...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

pond, which will be bad for the soil," Dr. Vyrieth said.

Sok Rathorn, who owns the farm and a larger area surrounding it, said that he had rented out the pig farm to two Chinese men, but could not remember their names. "In April, I saw two Chinese guys with four other foreigners go into the farm," he said. "I don't know what they were up to."

He said he had been questioned by police at the Ministry of Interior yesterday, but was returning to Kompong Speu province last night.

Kuch Rei, 45, who works as a guard on the land on which the farm is situated, said he called military police after he noticed an odd smell wafting from the farm.

"For a few days [last week], a strong smell was coming out," he said. "I saw two Cambodian workers go inside the farm then pour some powder...into a canal, but I wasn't really paying attention at the time."

Neighbors interviewed yesterday said that the smell had been coming from the farm on and off since April, but had become worse recently.

"We cannot say we found drugs, but it's the equipment used to make drugs, said Men

Sophal, director of the anti-drug police's technical department at the Ministry of Interior. "In the past, I've experienced that these substances are used to make methamphetamine."

"When I arrived this morning, I saw about 100 bags of white and yellow powders, and three big acid bottles. They had been poured out, leaving just a few spoonfuls, which we have taken to test at the laboratory."

Chemicals found in cold medicine can be reacted with acids as part of the process of producing methamphetamine. According to the U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), methamphetamine is the most common drug

in Cambodia, and its production in the country has gone up in recent years.

"The amount of methamphetamine tablets [seized in Cambodia] more than tripled in 2011 to some 264,000 compared with the total of 83,000 in 2010," Olivier Lernet, country manager at the UNODC, said in an email yesterday.

In 2007, police discovered one of the country's biggest-ever drug labs in Treng Trayoeng commune, also in Phnom Sruoch district. In that case, 18 people were arrested and 3 tons of precursor chemicals were found. Like at the lab in O commune, no drugs were found.

(Additional reporting by Saing Soenthrith)