



United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

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Hoosier NF Highlights

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Hidden Dangers on your National Forests



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There are dangers to be aware of in the woods. Some easily come to mind, rattlesnakes, wolves (not in Indiana), or perhaps the cougar that is occasionally reported on the Hoosier National Forest. Other dangers that are overlooked but can be even more dangerous include illegal activities such as the production of methamphetamine or growing marijuana. Many visitors come to the forest to experience the isolation and remoteness. These are exactly what make national forest's popular locations for cooking meth or growing marijuana.

In 2013 Forest Service Law Enforcement Officers removed over 10,000 marijuana plants from national forests in the Eastern Region. Eleven clandestine labs were cleaned up on Eastern Region national forests in 2013, and 15 drug related arrests were made.

If you came across one of these in the woods would you know what to look for? Do you know what the dangers are? Are you aware of how to stay safe?

Meth Production

The byproducts of meth production contaminate the surrounding area with harmful fumes and dangerous, potentially explosive chemicals. The chemicals penetrate the soil and wash into our streams. Cleaning up these areas is both costly and dangerous.

Methamphetamine labs are often characterized by strong odors similar to cat urine, or a chemical smell. You may see coffee filters with a shiny white substance, a dark red paste, or shiny white crystals. Often there are pots containing a powdery residue. Shacks, cabins, or trailers with blacked out windows are used, and even in colder weather the windows may be open. Excessive trash is almost always found in the immediate area. Trash items can include: antifreeze containers, lantern fuel cans, engine starting fluid cans, HEET cans, lithium batteries and empty battery packages, red chemically stained coffee filters, empty medication containers, drain cleaner and duct tape.

Shake and bake, or one-pot methods are small scale meth operations conducted in a 2-liter pop bottle. This method is extremely toxic and volatile.

What should you do if you find evidence of meth lab evidence on the Hoosier National Forest? Leave immediately and get to a safe location! Do not touch anything; chemicals used in making meth can cause serious damage to your skin, lungs, or eyes. When you are in a safe location call 911 to report what you saw and where you were.

Clean up of these sites requires experts trained in removing hazardous materials. Every pound of meth production leaves behind six pounds of toxic waste and can incur clean-up costs ranging from \$3100 to \$150,000.

Marijuana Production

Marijuana production in national forests is also on the rise. Two years ago, a large scale marijuana growing operation was found here on the Hoosier. These plantations are well prepared and well protected. The area is often heavily guarded and protected by dogs or booby trapped to keep people away and discourage reporting. The areas are cleared of competing vegetation and often have extensive irrigation systems with hoses. Plants are often grown in small openings under the tree canopy to prevent them from being seen from above. These operations also produce a lot of trash and toxic materials. The chemicals and fertilizers used to help grow larger plants can contaminate the surrounding soil and water. The accumulated trash associated with growers living on the national forest creates a costly clean up situation.

If you encounter a marijuana site, leave the area by carefully retracing your steps. When you are in a safe location, call 911 to report the site and its location.

More information can be found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/lei/safety-crime-prevention.php>.



Figure 1: Forest Service Law Enforcement Officer Lafayette Chamberlain with a healthy marijuana plant found on the Hoosier National Forest in 2010.



Figure 2 An example of trash left behind at a marijuana plantation in the Hoosier National Forest.