

Considerations for Clandestine Fentanyl Labs



SCOPE: This JCAT product is coauthored with DEA and provides response, recognition, and safety considerations for first responders on how to identify indicators of clandestine fentanyl labs employed by FTO-designated transnational criminal organizations; how to recognize signs and evidence related to the synthesis and processing of fentanyl; and how to make notifications and ensure effective information-sharing practices. Some of the hazards discussed in this product are not specific to clandestine fentanyl labs and this list is not all encompassing. First responders should use their training, experience, and judgment in assessing the totality of the circumstances on the scene.

Clandestine fentanyl labs can be located in various settings, including residential homes, commercial buildings, or outdoor areas, making it difficult to predict the layout and potential hazards. An emergency involving an illicit fentanyl lab may likely involve the response of police, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, necessitating real-time information sharing and a collective approach to ensuring scene safety for first responders. Breathable fentanyl particulates can be found at synthesis labs and are almost always encountered at milling, grinding, and tableting sites, risking exposure and overdose. In addition, the production of fentanyl involves highly potent and volatile chemicals, which can lead to hazards if mishandled.

PROPER USE OF PPE WILL KEEP YOU SAFE

DEA recommends first responders use **N95 masks** and **nitrile gloves**. Upon confirmation of the presence of fentanyl or suspicion of a fentanyl lab, law enforcement should call for trained personnel. For additional information, law enforcement can contact the DEA Illicit Hazardous Environment (IHE) coordinator assigned to their geographic area.

CHEMICAL HAZARDS

- ⚠️ **The greatest hazard is inhalation of fine particulate fentanyl and solvent inhalation to non-masked personnel. Avoid actions that can disturb and displace any powders in the lab.**
- ⚠️ **Avoid skin contact with unidentified chemicals.**

POTENTIAL SYMPTOMS

- **Slow breathing or no breathing**
- **Drowsiness or unresponsiveness**
- **Constricted or pinpoint pupils**

INDICATORS



- A** Unusual or strong chemical odors; excessive trash or debris, including chemical containers or packaging
- B** Unusual or excessive ventilation systems
- C** Windows covered with tape or paper; doors or entry points with alarms or traps or reinforced with metal or other materials
- D** Presence of gloves, masks, or other personal protective equipment (PPE), including unusual or homemade safety equipment such as makeshift showers or eyewash stations or used or unused naloxone kits
- E** Presence of fentanyl or other controlled substances
- F** Presence of production equipment, such as pill presses, heat lamps, blenders, or coffee grinders with obvious residues
- G** Presence of cutting agents or flavorants
- H** Presence of laboratory equipment, such as beakers, flasks, buckets, steel pots, or thermometers, including unusual or homemade equipment such as reaction vessels or dyes or colorants
- I** Unusual or suspicious activity, such as frequent visitors or suspicious deliveries
- J** Presence of security cameras or other surveillance equipment
- K** Unusual or excessive use of air fresheners or other odor-masking products
- L** Suspicious UAS activity around the location
- M** Heat-proof vessels paired with heating elements, buckets with fluids, electric stirring paddles or stirring sticks, and cheesecloth or other filtering devices
- N** Heat lamps and trays where the product can be spread out for drying
- O** Blenders, chemical adulterants to alter flavor or color, and stampers to identify the producer or misidentify the product
- P** Pill presses, including industrial pill presses, which are able to make thousands of pills per hour, or improvised setups

IDENTIFYING THE STAGE OF PRODUCTION

Properly identifying the stage of fentanyl production—synthesis, drying, cutting and packing, and pill pressing—may assist in understanding the purpose of the location. Below are some examples of equipment that can help identify the fentanyl production stages.

M SYNTHESIS:

Heat-proof vessels paired with heating elements, buckets with fluids, electric stirring paddles or stirring sticks, and cheesecloth or other filtering devices

N DRYING:

Heat lamps and trays where the product can be spread out for drying

O CUTTING AND PACKING:

Blenders, chemical adulterants to alter flavor or color, and stampers to identify the producer or misidentify the product

P PILL PRESSING:

Pill presses, including industrial pill presses, which are able to make thousands of pills per hour, or improvised setups

Considerations for Clandestine Fentanyl Labs (continued)

THE SCENE

 Planning

 Responding

 Identifying

 Reporting

 Mitigating

Icons highlight various aspects of scene response, recovery, investigation, and incident management.

-  Stay up-to-date with the latest information and guidance on exposures
-  Identify any chemicals present on the scene
-  Use caution when approaching or entering a suspected illicit fentanyl lab
-  Notify law enforcement to document and preserve evidence
-  Be aware of the potential for booby traps and other security measures
-  Be prepared to administer naloxone and other medical interventions in case of an overdose
-  Be of aware of individuals displaying symptoms of exposure
-  Wear proper PPE, including respiratory protection, gloves, and eye protection
-  Coordinate with other agencies and personnel necessary, including hazardous material workers, law enforcement, fire services, EMS, and DEA
-  Be prepared to wash identified solids off of exposed skin using soap and water, and avoid alcohol-based sanitizer. Solid fentanyl does not inherently pose a contact hazard.
-  Make a note of any suspicious glassware, powders, pills, chemicals (with identifiers if possible), or other equipment

FIRST RESPONDER SAFETY

Responders may encounter booby traps or other hazards designed to detect or deter law enforcement. Effective response requires a coordinated effort between law enforcement, fire departments, emergency medical services, and hazardous materials teams.

RESOURCES

Information on Naloxone

- [Naloxone DrugFacts \(NIDA\)](#)
- [Lifesaving Naloxone \(CDC\)](#)
- [Opioid Overdoses Reversal Medications \(SAMHSA\)](#)

The Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI) is a collaborative effort with state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) law enforcement partners. This initiative helps prevent terrorism and related criminal activity by establishing a national capacity for gathering, documenting, processing, analyzing, and sharing SAR information. <https://www.dhs.gov/nationwide-sar-initiative-nsi/online-sar-training>

IMAGES FROM CLANDESTINE FENTANYL LABS



State and Major Urban Area Fusion Centers are state-owned and -operated centers that serve as focal points for the receipt, analysis, gathering, and sharing of threat-related information between SLTT, federal, and private-sector partners. <https://www.dhs.gov/fusion-center-locations-and-contact-information>

JCAT First Responder's Toolboxes may provide additional information about terrorist tactics, techniques, and procedures and response and mitigation considerations. The toolboxes can be found on JCAT's website (DNI.gov/JCAT), DHS's Homeland Security Information Network, or FBI's Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal.

DEA

- DEA Command Center, (202) 307-4228. Request to be placed in contact with the Unit Chief of the IHE Training Unit, who will direct you to the appropriate DEA IHE coordinator (either national or regional).

FBI

- Clandestine Laboratory Chemical Awareness Card, available on FBI's Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal/ Justice Connect



PRODUCT FEEDBACK

Please use the link below to complete a short survey. Your feedback will help JCAT develop counterterrorism products that support the public safety and private sector community.

<https://www.JCAT-url.com>

For further information, please email JCAT
jcat@odni.gov



(U) The Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team (JCAT) is a collaboration by NCTC, DHS, FBI, state, local, tribal, and territorial government personnel to improve information sharing and enhance public safety. The First Responder's Toolbox is an ad hoc, unclassified reference aid intended to promote counterterrorism coordination among federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial government authorities and partnerships with private sector officials in deterring, preventing, disrupting, and responding to terrorist attacks.