



The open lands of the Navajo Nation play host to a rising number of clandestine meth labs.

DAVID MCNEW / GETTY

High Times

A Navajo town deals with the ravages of the latest addictive drug, crystal meth. *By Dan Frosch*

DR. THOMAS DROUHARD REMEMBERS THE first time he stared the drug dead in its eye five years ago.

He was on duty at the only hospital in Tuba City, Arizona, a dusty town of some 9,000 deep inside the Navajo reservation, when a woman was rushed into the emergency room with nine stab wounds to the chest.

"I'd never seen anything like it," says Drouhard, a warm, easygoing man who has worked as a surgeon on Navajo land for nearly three decades. "Looking back on that level of violence, I now know exactly what it was."

Meth, a highly addictive white powder made from over-the-counter ingredients like iodine, Drano and ephedrine, gives users a rush that can last eight hours. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, it also causes a propensity toward psychotic behavior.

It was the effects of crystal methamphetamine that began wreaking havoc on rural, overwhelmingly white

Midwest towns in the early '90s. Between 1995 and 2002, meth-related emergency room visits nationwide jumped 54 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and cities from New York to San Francisco all have experienced recent outbreaks.

Tuba City might be getting it worse. There were 14 meth-related deaths here last year, a staggering number for a town this size. A local health department study found that 12 percent of Tuba's teens were using meth, as were 17 percent of residents between the age of 27 and 45. A third of the patients screened at the emergency room now test positive for the drug.

Among the reasons the drug has hit the area so hard, local police say, is that the reservation's vast frontier lends itself to the clandestine labs used to produce meth (the Navajo Nation is about the size of West Virginia). It's also cheap—a quarter of a gram, enough to get a person high for a few days, runs \$20 to \$40.

An Illegal War

November 19, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) will hold a hearing regarding the refugee status of Brandon Hughey, a 19-year-old former American soldier who deserted his Army unit and moved to Canada to avoid deployment in Iraq.

Hughey's fate—and the fate of two other American soldiers, Jeremy Hinzman, 25, and David Sanders, 20, who similarly fled to Canada to avoid serving in Iraq and are awaiting immigration hearings—hinges on whether he can prove that he would face “persecution” should he return to the United States. If the IRB rejects his application, Hughey would be forced to return to the United States, where he would face a dishonorable discharge and prosecution for desertion, which could result in a lengthy prison term or even, though less likely, execution.

Historically, it has been difficult to prove that the United States persecutes its citizens for their beliefs, and the IRB does not consider punishment for breaking a law tantamount to persecution—unless the law itself can be considered a form of persecution.

That caveat is exactly what Hughey and his lawyer, Jeffry House, believe will turn the case in their favor. Citing the Nuremberg Principles—which state that a person committing a crime under international law, even if committed under the order “of his Government or of a superior,” is still guilty of that crime—House will argue that because the war in Iraq was not sanctioned under international law, his client was being coerced into committing a criminal act.

The War Resisters Support Campaign, a coalition of Canadian community organizations, has launched a petition drive that calls on the Canadian government “to demonstrate its commitment to international law and the treaties to which it is a signatory, by making provision for U.S. war objectors to have sanctuary in this country.”

The petition can be read in full online at: www.petitiononline.com/resister/petition.html

—Brian Cook

Further, crystal meth is not yet prohibited under Navajo law, preventing law enforcement from prosecuting cases in tribal court, which has jurisdiction over most crimes on tribal lands. This forces Navajo police to trek 79 miles to Flagstaff to arraign meth suspects in federal court.

Compounding all of this, the Navajo long have been vulnerable to addiction—almost one quarter of the reservation's 190,000 residents are unemployed and the rate of alcoholism is six times that of the entire United States.

Levon Hatathlie, a drug and alcohol counselor for the Tuba City Department of Behavioral Health Sciences, says she rarely saw anyone on meth until two years ago. Now, Hatathlie works with 13 users. Most are young adults, but a 15-year-old recently walked into her office. “It was shocking,” she said.

With meth use becoming so widespread, the drug has caught the eye of a FBI task force in Flagstaff, working violent crimes on the western half of Navajo land as part of a cooperative agreement with the Navajo tribal government.

Though actual numbers are hard to come by, the rate of violence is greater than ever, says Agent McDonald Rominger.

“Instead of just one violent act, which is what we see with alcohol, it becomes five random acts of violence when someone is on a meth run,” Rominger said.

Greg Adair, a Navajo police investigator in Tuba City, says meth-induced crimes like that of a 24-year-old Navajo man stabbed 21 times last year—both he and his assailant were thought to be on meth—are of a brutality rarely seen before in Tuba City. Recent signs indicate meth-related crimes are worsening. On September 24, for instance, Navajo police seized 5 pounds of meth from a car pulled over outside Tuba City. Three days later, an 18-month-old baby was found dead near Tuba City. His parents were high on meth and had abandoned him.

FBI Agent Nick Manns, who works the eastern half of the Navajo reservation 240 miles from Tuba City, says that 40 percent of the crimes he now deals with are meth-related.

But because of the oversight in tribal law, arresting someone for possessing meth on Navajo land is difficult.

Last year, the U.S. Attorney's office in Flagstaff agreed to let police bring meth suspects arrested on Navajo land to federal court, even though the federal system is typically designed for larger interstate drug trafficking cases. Since then, Navajo police,

working with the FBI, have brought 16 meth cases to Flagstaff, but law enforcement officials say the numbers would be far higher if they could move meth cases through the considerably less burdened tribal court system.

Deanna Jackson, spokeswoman for Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, says a Navajo law prohibiting meth on tribal land is coming soon. “President Shirley is working towards drafting legislation we hope will be introduced during the next legislative session in October.”

Meanwhile, the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation isn't waiting around. Director Michelle Archuleta has launched a massive prevention campaign—conducting studies, sending experts and police into schools, consulting with tribal elders, and commissioning Navajo filmmaker Shonie De La Rosa to produce a documentary.

“We're trying to improve the wellness of this community from a native perspective by including entire Navajo families and also Navajo spiritual philosophies in our outreach,” Archuleta said.

Such localized efforts are clearly having an impact: There were only three meth-related deaths this year, although the drug now is spreading beyond Tuba City disturbingly fast.

And the losses remain painfully personal. Yvonne Hoosava, a secretary in the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation and lieutenant governor of the Upper Village of Moenkopi, a nearby town on the Hopi reservation, cries quietly when discussing her meth-addicted son.

“If you've seen the movie *The Exorcist*, that's exactly how he sounded,” Hoosava said as she talked of the meth binge her son went on last year. “It was like the devil was talking.”

Dennis Bowen, a counselor at Tuba City's alternative high school, has faith that these new demons can be combated using cultural ties. By reinforcing Navajo culture in some and introducing it to others, Bowen is hoping to reaffirm an identity that he believes is strong enough to overcome the meth problem.

“We have protective factors that other places don't—our elders, our language, our traditions,” Bowen said. “And because of who we are, we have the potential to get this thing under control. ... We're not helpless.” ■

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Demise of Democracy

Putin orders a massive overhaul of Russia's political system to combat terrorists. *By Fred Weir*

RUSSIA'S DEMOCRATIC window, never pried open very wide following the Soviet Union's demise, is slamming shut.

Citing a summer wave of terrorist attacks that killed 430 people, President Vladimir Putin last month ordered sweeping changes to the country's political system that will effectively abolish regional gubernatorial elections, sharply reduce the space for independent politics and accelerate the pro-Kremlin United Russia Party's merger with the state bureaucracy to create a single party-state behemoth reminiscent of the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union. "After these changes I am in a state of shock," says Yevgeny Ya-

sin, a former Russian Economics Minister, now head of research at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. "This is directed against the democratization of the country and can only lead to an authoritarian regime."

Boris Yeltsin destroyed Russia's first freely elected parliament in a violent confrontation 11 years ago and used his victory to write a new constitution that granted the lion's share of power to the Kremlin while reducing the legislature to little more than ornamental status. Since coming to power about 5 years ago, Putin has further shrunk the role of elected representatives, reimposed state control over much of the media, cracked down on politically active

nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and beefed-up security services. Each turn of the screw has been rationalized by increasingly severe terrorist attacks, from a wave of still-unexplained apartment bombings in 1999, to the seizure of 800 hostages in a Moscow theater two years ago, to the horrific siege of a North Caucasus school last month that killed 330 people, mostly children (see "The Bloodiest Chapter," October 11).

A raft of Kremlin-authored bills are currently before the State Duma, where United Russia's two-thirds majority is expected to deliver them with few amendments into law before year's end. The most controversial ones will claw back

the right of Russia's 89 regions to directly elect their governors—won after considerable struggle a decade ago. Instead, the Kremlin will propose its own candidate to be "endorsed" by each local legislature.

If regional lawmakers should reject the president's nominee, the draft law empowers the Kremlin to dissolve the uncooperative legislature and appoint an "interim governor" entitled to serve for five years. Putin argues the measures are needed to restore central authority and curb abuses by governors, some of whom have been in thrall to local oligarchs or crime bosses. But critics see the move as a cynical power grab.

"Putin wants to use this opportunity to destroy the last vestiges of Yeltsin-era democracy," says Alexander Golts, a national security expert with the weekly *Yezhenedelny Zhurnal*. "Instead of attacking terrorists, he's attacking our electoral system."



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