



## Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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### Media Release

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**From:** Michael Terry  
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**Re:** HCSO Hosts Meth Lab Mitigation Safety Training

**Date:** August 22, 2014

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During the week of Aug. 18, training was offered on how to identify and safely mitigate the dangers associated with clandestine methamphetamine labs. The specialized training, which drew attendees from as far away as Oklahoma, was hosted by the Hernando County Sheriff's Office at the Sand Hill Scout Reservation in Brooksville.

In recent years, meth labs have become increasingly prevalent in and around Hernando County. Lieutenant John Cameron of the Hernando County Sheriff's Office said the driving force behind the increasing number of meth labs is how readily accessible the ingredients used to make methamphetamine are and how they can be legally obtained.

"It's all around us," Lt. Cameron said. The training will allow the Sheriff's Office better address the growing problem here in Hernando County.

The Sheriff's Office invited Innovative Narcotic Investigative Technologies, based in Bay County, to teach the course in an effort to make the invaluable training accessible to as many Hernando County deputies as possible.

Members of the Hernando County Fire Rescue Hazmat 3 were on scene Thursday assisting in the training. They are often needed when a meth lab is encountered due to the volatile chemicals used to make meth.

The class was taught by Gary Schell, a current law enforcement officer, who has worked more than 500 methamphetamine labs and more than 800 methamphetamine related investigations during his 19-year career. He was assisted by Larry Plotkin and Brian Atkinson, who both have a host of experience mitigating the dangers meth labs pose to both law enforcement officers and the public.

Schell said the key to the training is for officers to understand their limitations and always remember to put their safety first. “You’ve got to know your capabilities,” Schell said, adding there are times when additional resources will be needed to safely mitigate a situation.

By hosting the event, the Sheriff’s Office received free training for five of its deputies, or a savings to taxpayers of \$2,500. Two deputies were also recertified.

A total of 33 law enforcement officers were trained and certified to OSHA standards during the weeklong course, which included two days of hands-on field work.

Lieutenant Cameron said the training is designed to put deputies in a life-like scenario to prepare them for what they might encounter in the field.

With temperatures well above 90 degrees on Wednesday and Thursday, officers donned layers of protective gear, including hazmat suits, masks, and gloves in addition to a 30-pound oxygen tank, which is required to safely operate in the toxic environment.

Lieutenant Cameron said chemicals used to make methamphetamine are extremely volatile and officers must always be aware of the dangers, which include possible explosion, chemical burns and inhaling toxic fumes.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis said, “There has been a lot of effort placed on keeping prescription pills out of the hands of abusers. Law enforcement and others, from Attorney General Pam Bondi to our very own Hernando County Board of County Commissioners, have succeeded in drying up the pill mills that plagued our community. Although methamphetamine wreaks havoc on the abuser’s body, we have, unfortunately, seen an increase in its use over the last year or two. This proactive training will allow us to safely cleanup these toxic waste sites that abusers and dealers use to manufacture this poison.”