Methamphetamine Awareness

By CATE HALL/Correspondent

The first time a person uses methamphetamine they usually think they are having a heart attack.

Damascus, VA recently offered an awareness seminar about methamphetamine taught by Jack R. Tolbert, one of eight Hazardous Materials Officers in the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. Since 1987 Tolbert has found over 50 labs in the 19 counties he supervises including Washington County.

Tennessee is the number one state in the country for meth usage. In the past year, Kentucky’s usage has increased by 60 percent. “In Virginia, most of the labs I have found have been in the Southwestern counties,” Tolbert said. In 2010, there were 106 meth labs found in Virginia and 1,070 in Tennessee.

Tolbert explained the methods for making meth after saying, “You can find the recipes and instructions online so I don’t feel bad for explaining it all to you so you know what to look for.” In Southwest Virginia, the most common method is called shake and bake.

Meth affects the human body in many ways. It affects the central nervous system and all it takes is once to be hooked because your braid is affected. It produces euphoria and a sense of energy. Users will often feel like there are spiders crawling under their skin, so they scratch and open up oozing sores. It can cause extreme anorexia and respiratory problems as well as anxiety, paranoia, and violent behavior. “Meth ruins people’s lives. If not their own, the lives of those around them,” Tolbert said.

Tolbert used an example of violent behavior by telling the story of a man who, while high on meth, thought his son was demon-possessed. He murdered his son, cut off the boy’s head, and then flung it out of his van window while driving. Meth not only affects the user, but also those around him or her. Tolbert spoke of a case in Washington County where, “A mother gave her 14-year-old son meth so he would do his homework. She said he could have it, but he had to go to school the next day.” Tolbert said that there are countless cases where a child has been killed by either ingesting meth, or by being uncared for. “When people are cooking meth, they don’t worry about the kids. If the kids want food they have to find it for themselves,” he said.

Tolbert said that even though it only takes one time to become addicted to meth, it is a very difficult drug to quit. “Less than 10 percent of those who go into rehab actually succeed,” Tolbert said. He also explained that withdrawal symptoms do not show up right after stopped use of the drug. It can take anywhere from 30 – 90 days, and then the person usually becomes so depressed he or she may commit suicide.

Damascus Police Chief Bill Nunley commented that, “When meth users are put in jail they will sometimes peel off the scabs from their sores and sell them to their fellow inmates for the meth qualities that they have.”

In an effort to teach children about meth and to try to persuade them to not try it, Chief Nunley said that there will be a meth awareness program given at the local schools once a month. “Also, we are training business owners and all the employees, that way when people come in and they are buying certain products together that are typical for use in making meth, the owner or employees can write down the car’s tag information and call us.”

“We want the public to know that we are there for these ones {who use meth}. Just because someone gets meth or makes meth doesn’t make them a bad person. I know that in many eyes it does, but these people need help,” Chief Nunley said.