

Costs of a Methamphetamine (Meth) Case

By Gail Carlson

Case Scenario

The case scenario created for this exercise is a couple with two children, first time offenders in Ramsey County. The meth lab is a small “mom and pop” operation in St Paul. The couple rents the home and the arrest occurs at 6:00 p.m. The operating assumptions for this case are as follows:

- No weapons were found.
- The children do not have any permanent injury from the meth lab
- The woman regains custody of the children after treatment
- The county is paying the cleanup costs.
- The offenders plead guilty after the 2nd court hearing.
- The man is sentenced to 61.4 months, serving 40.5 months in prison plus 5 years probation, the average sentence for an offender convicted of manufacture of methamphetamine.¹ The woman is sentenced to 30 months in prison stayed, treatment and 5 years probation.

Factors that may impact the cost of the case;

There are many factors that might increase the cost of the case. Some of these factors include:

- Law enforcement costs, if the investigation is extensive.
- Medical costs, if the children are impaired by the chemicals found in the home or if the woman is pregnant.
- Prosecution and public defender costs, if the case goes to trial.
- If child protection removes the children from the home permanently.
- Cleanup costs if a fire occurs and either destroys or severely damages the home or nearby homes.
- If a weapon is found, the sentence will be longer and the incarceration costs will be higher.
- The type and length of treatment and aftercare services.
- The woman may need public assistance upon release.

Costs to the Public Based on Case Progression

Law enforcement:

- Investigation: We are assuming that the investigation before the search warrant involves 50 staff hours at \$25/hour for a total cost of \$1,250.²
- State Hazardous Materials Team: The initial response involves about 10 people (including uniformed officers, clan lab certified technicians, firefighters and

paramedics). The uniformed officers and technicians work about 8 hours (1/2 on overtime) - firefighters and paramedics standby for 1 ½ hours.³ The technicians remove the hazardous materials from the house for testing and photographing. The total cost of the initial response would be \$3,500.

- Non-re-useable equipment costs about \$400.⁴
Includes: Boots-\$10-15, gloves-\$10-15, mask filters-\$30, tyvek suits-\$20-30, testing pump tubes-\$30 and other costs⁵
- BCA Crime Lab. There is a fee of \$2-3,000 to test and store the materials.⁶
- Jail: The suspects are booked into the Ramsey County Jail.⁷
 - Booking fee \$150 per offender
 - Jail for about 2-3 days (\$80/day).
 - Drug test and medical screening at a cost of \$100.
 - Total jail costs for two adults range from \$520-680.⁸

Total law enforcement costs, including investigation, Hazmat team, testing, jail and equipment: **\$8,070-9,280.**

Other Expenses. City inspector's to post condemned property signs cost **\$100.**⁹

Social Services:

- House Calls transport the children to Children's Hospital for a shelter exam at a cost of \$100/each. Assuming that the children are healthy, House Calls transport the children to a shelter.¹⁰
- Shelter exam is \$450/child plus \$183 urine drug testing fee.¹¹
- Temporary foster care. The children stay at the shelter for 30 days until more permanent foster care is found. The cost of shelter is \$53/day each for a total of \$3,180. Each child is given \$600 for personal items.
- Long term foster care is \$1,000-1,200/month plus \$600 each for personal items. The children are in foster care for 3 months. The total cost for long term shelter for two children is \$6,000-\$7,200.¹²

Total medical exam, health exam and shelter costs for two children range from **\$11,846-13,046**¹³

Public Defenders:

- CHIPS (Children in Protective Services) Costs: Attorney fees run about \$1,839 plus a dispositional worker to total \$2,200.
- Criminal Costs: (Costs to defend the client against felony drug charges)\$1,302 (13 hours total or \$651 each) + \$500 for investigator and dispositional worker.

Total public defender fees are **\$4,002-4,102.**¹⁴

Prosecution:

- The cost of attorneys, paralegals and support staff comes to about \$100/hour.
- We are assuming each hearing is 2 hours of attorney time 2 adults X 100/hour=\$800.¹⁵
- CHIPS case: the initial hearing is 4-5 hours for 2 children @\$100/hour=\$800-1,000
- Follow-up: 2 hours x 2 children x \$100/hour=\$400.

Total prosecution costs are **\$2,000-2,200**.

Court: Sentencing is done on the third court appearance.

- Judge is \$56.58/hour
- Judge's law clerk is \$19.02/hour,
- Court reporter is \$27.30/hour, and
- Ramsey county law clerk is \$17.87/hour for a total of \$120.77/hour for 2 individuals.
- Bailiff's costs \$23.59/hour for about 2 hours.
- Total court time would be about 2 ½ hours including time to review the pre-sentence investigation.

Total court costs total approximately **\$651.03**.¹⁶

Pre-sentence investigation:

- Costs at least \$320 each for a total of **\$640**¹⁷.

Sentencing:

- The woman is sentenced to 30 months in prison stayed, treatment and five years of probation.¹⁸
- The man is sentenced to 61.4 months in prison and 5 years probation.¹⁹
(This is the average sentence for this offense-he will serve 40.5 months)

Probation:

- Costs \$700/year plus an initial supervision fee of \$200, which is paid by the offender.

Total probation costs for two adults for five years each are **\$7,000**.²⁰

Prison:

- Costs \$80.52/day in 2003 for 40.5 months for one adult for a total of **\$97,831.80**.²¹

Chemical Dependency Treatment:

- Initial chemical assessment fee of \$100 each offender.²²

- Average Ramsey County in-patient cost is \$2,600 for one adult. Total treatment cost is **\$2,800**

Cleanup: We are assuming that the county is paying for the cleanup costs.

- Contractor is called to decontaminate the property (\$5000-\$10,000).
- In addition, there is a testing fee of \$1,000-1,500.
- Total cleanup costs are **\$6,000-11,500**. Homeowner’s property taxes are assessed the costs of cleanup, however if the landlord is unable to pay, the county would pick up the costs.²³

Total costs range from **\$140,840.83-149,000.83**

¹ Jill Payne, MN Sentencing Guidelines Commission
² Rich Clark, Ramsey County Sheriffs Office.
³ Asst Fire Chief Dave Pleasant, St Paul Fire Department.
⁴ Paul Stevens, BCA
⁵ Rich Clark, Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office
⁶ Paul Stevens BCA
⁷ Paul Stevens, BCA
⁸ Dori Martinez, Ramsey County Jail
⁹ Andy Dawkins, Housing Code Enforcement.
¹⁰ Kay Wittenstein, House Calls.
¹¹ Jean Henry, St. Paul Children’s Hospital
¹² Kurt Koehler, Ramsey County Social Services
¹³ Ibid
¹⁴ Jim Hanks, State of MN Public Defenders Office.
¹⁵ Kim Bingham, Ramsey County Attorney’s Office
¹⁶ Dan Lundstrom, Ramsey County Court Administrator
¹⁷ Bob Steiner, Ramsey County Probation.
¹⁸ Anne McDiarmid, Ramsey County Courts.
¹⁹ Jill Payne, MN Sentencing Guidelines Commission
²⁰ Anne McDiarmid, Ramsey County Courts
²¹ Deb Kirchner, Dept of Corrections
²² Kurt Koehler, Ramsey County Social Services
²³ Bay West