

Illegal Drug Lab Decontamination and Certification

Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q. What is an illegal (clandestine) drug lab?

A. Methamphetamine, also known as speed, crank, or crystal, is a powerful central nervous stimulant with a potential to cause drug dependency. An illegal methamphetamine (meth) lab is one which is set up to manufacture this illegal drug. There are several different methods that may be used to produce meth. These methods incorporate a variety of chemicals including, but not limited to, explosives, acids, corrosives, solvents, metals, and salts. During the manufacturing process, other compounds and by-products are produced. The fumes/vapors and potential spills resulting from the manufacturing process, are considered toxic.

Q. Where are these labs found?

A. Meth labs can be found in rural, city and suburban residences; barns, garages and other outbuildings; back rooms of businesses; apartments; hotel and motel rooms; storage facilities; vacant buildings; boats; and vehicles.

Many people may be unaware that they're living near a meth lab. Here are some things to look for:

- Unusual and/or strong odors - like cat urine, ether, ammonia, acetone or other chemicals.
- Structures with the windows blacked out.
- Renters who pay their landlords in cash. Many drug-dealers trade exclusively in cash.
- Lots of traffic - people coming and going at unusual times. There may be little traffic during the day, but at night the activity increases dramatically.
- Large quantities of trash – such as antifreeze containers, lantern fuel containers, red-stained coffee filters, drain cleaner and duct tape.
- Unusual amounts of glass containers being brought into the residence.



Q. What are the potential hazards that exist in a clandestine lab? Why should I be concerned about living in a house that was an illegal meth lab?

A. The risk of injury from chemical exposure depends on the chemical itself, the concentration, the quantity and the length and route of exposure. Chemicals may enter the body by being breathed, eaten, injected (by an accidental needle or skin prick), or absorbed by the skin.

Acute Exposure: An acute chemical exposure is one that occurs over a relatively short period of time and may result in health effects. Acute health effects to high levels of contaminants found in methamphetamine labs cause shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, dizziness, lack of coordination, chemical irritation, and burns to the skin, eyes, mouth and nose, and in severe cases, death. Acute reactions of this nature could occur during or immediately after a drug bust, before the lab has been ventilated.

Less severe symptoms resulting from a less acute exposure cause headache, nausea, dizziness, and fatigue or lethargy. These symptoms have been known to occur in people who have entered a drug lab after the bust has been completed, but before the property has been adequately cleaned and ventilated. These symptoms usually go away after several hours.

Illegal Drug Lab Decontamination and Certification

Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Chronic Exposure: Chronic exposure occurs over an extended period of time, such as weeks, months, or years. A chronic health effect is one that usually appears after a lengthy period of time, possibly years. Not much is known about the chronic health effects from these labs. However, there is scientific evidence from animal and human toxicity studies that shows the chemicals used in the manufacture of this drug can cause a range of health effects. These include cancer, damage to the brain, liver and kidneys, birth defects, and reproductive problems, such as miscarriages.

Source: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/CDL/MethFS.htm>

Q. Who is responsible for the property cleanup?

A. Property owners are responsible to ensure the proper clean up and testing of an illegal drug manufacturing site. Costs incurred are also the responsibility of the property owner.

Owners who decide to clean buildings on their own should be aware that building materials and furniture may absorb contaminants and, in some cases, give off fumes. Owners should wear and use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to ensure they do not expose themselves to harmful contaminants.

Sometimes scrubbing and painting is all that is necessary to restore a former meth lab to a “fit-for-use” living environment. Sometimes, contamination is so widespread that the inside of the building needs to be completely renovated. Across the U.S., the response to cleaning up former meth lab properties ranges from minor cleaning to complete demolition of buildings. Some meth labs may require soil and/or groundwater cleanup as well, depending on the extent of how and where chemical wastes were managed.

ADEC strongly encourages the hiring of qualified cleanup contractors to conduct cleanup and decontamination of the property.

Q. What is the involvement of the State’s hazardous materials response teams?

A. The U. S. Drug Enforcement Agency contracts with an environmental consultant to categorize and remove gross contamination and drug production apparatus and chemicals. The documentation of the substances at the site is also gathered as evidence for prosecuting the illegal production of methamphetamines. Removal and sampling of residual contamination that still remains is the property owner’s responsibility.

During a bust, the drug enforcement officials and their contractors will first remove evidence from the site. Chemical hazard contractors are brought in by the drug enforcement officials to remove containers of hazardous chemicals and equipment related to the operation of the meth lab.

The State’s hazardous materials response teams **ONLY** provide backup and support to the drug enforcement officials when a lab is busted and are not obligated to provide further assistance to the landowner to cleanup residual contamination.

Illegal Drug Lab Decontamination and Certification *Frequently Asked Questions*

PROPERTY OWNERS

Q. My property has been posted by police as being a clandestine drug lab, what do I do now?

A. If your property is determined to be a clandestine drug lab and posted by law enforcement, you have four days to ensure that access to the residence is restricted and that the property is secured from access. The property may only be accessed to decontaminate and sample the residence.

There are currently no federal or universal cleanup standards developed at this time for properties contaminated by meth labs. The State of Alaska has established reoccupation standards and decontamination requirements.

Q. I own a multi-unit apartment complex and one of the units has been posted as an illegal meth lab. How does this affect the other units in the building?

A. Units sharing a ventilation system may be affected. The owner of the multi-unit property is required to sample the ductwork and ventilation registers in all units that share the ventilation system for meth. If meth is detected above the cleanup level, the unit must be decontaminated as outlined in the *Guidance and Standards for Cleanup of Illegal Drug-Manufacturing Sites*. This document can be found in the following web site:
<http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/methlab>

Q. Where can I find a cleanup company?

A. Although ADEC strongly recommends that the property owner consider utilizing qualified persons for decontamination, and environmental or health

professionals for confirmation sampling, State law does not require this.

Section 3.2 of the *Guidance and Standards for Cleanup of Illegal Drug-Manufacturing Sites* identifies what is required and provides recommendations for hiring a contractor to perform these services. The best place to locate a contractor with these qualifications is in the yellow pages of your phone book or to call your local environmental consulting companies.



Q. What lab do I use to analyze the samples?

A. The analytical laboratories identified in the ADEC website may be utilized to perform the sample analyses required to determine whether a residence, formerly used as a meth manufacturing site, is "Fit for Use". The downloadable file has contact information for laboratories and a list of analyses each lab can or cannot do. The file can be found at the following website address:
<http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/methlab>

NOTE: All methamphetamine samples will have to be shipped out of state to one of the laboratories on the list. Turnaround time for analytical results varies between laboratories. At the time that this list was compiled, SGS Environmental Services was the only laboratory located within the state that had the capability of performing the analysis for

Illegal Drug Lab Decontamination and Certification

Frequently Asked Questions

PROPERTY OWNERS

meth. However, even SGS must ship these samples to their facilities located in the continental USA.

owner that the property was decontaminated and that laboratory analytical results demonstrate that the cleanup standards have been met.

Q. What records should I keep if I have certified my property to be decontaminated and meeting state clean up standards?

A. Recommended cleanup documentations are provided in the Appendix B of the *Guidance and Standards for Cleanup of Illegal Drug-Manufacturing Site*. Although not a requirement, cleanup documentations should be retained, at minimum, until the house or residence is sold.

Note: A person, who knowingly transfers, sells, leases, or rents a meth lab property that has not been determined to be 'Fit for Use' is in violation of AS 46.03.510. This violation is a class A misdemeanor. Persons convicted of a class A misdemeanor can be sentenced up to one year in jail and/or fined up to \$10,000.

Q. How do I get my property off the list?

A. To remove the property from the list and allow reoccupation, the property owner or owner's agent is required to do the following:

- Decontaminate the property and collect samples in accordance with Section 3 and 4 of the *Guidance and Standards for Cleanup of Illegal Drug-Manufacturing Site*.
- Submit samples to a laboratory for analysis. If the sample results do not confirm that decontamination efforts were sufficient to meet the cleanup standards, additional decontamination is required and samples must be retaken for those areas that failed to meet the cleanup standards.
- Submit documentation to ADEC certifying that cleanup standards have been met. ADEC will remove the property from the list of drug-manufacturing sites upon receipt of the certification statements by the property

Illegal Drug Lab Decontamination and Certification

Frequently Asked Questions

CLEANUP AND SAMPLING

The goal of cleanup is to reduce residual contaminants, especially meth, to below the detection level of the required sampling equipment or below the established fit-for-use standard.

Q. Who is responsible for the property cleanup?

A. Property owners are responsible to ensure the proper clean up and testing of an illegal drug manufacturing site. Costs incurred are also the responsibility of the property owner.

Owners who decide to clean buildings on their own should be aware that building materials and furniture may absorb contaminants and, in some cases, give off fumes. Owners should wear and use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to ensure they do not expose themselves to harmful contaminants.

Sometimes scrubbing and painting is all that is necessary to restore a former meth lab to a "fit-for-use" living environment. Sometimes, contamination is so widespread that the inside of the building needs to be completely renovated. Across the U.S., the response to cleaning up former meth lab properties ranges from minor cleaning to complete demolition of buildings. Some meth labs may require soil and/or groundwater cleanup as well, depending on the extent of how and where chemical wastes were managed.

ADEC strongly encourages the hiring of qualified cleanup contractors to conduct cleanup and decontamination of the property.

Q. How is the production of methamphetamine more dangerous than other drugs?

A. The manufacturing of any illegal drug presents a hazard to the public. However, drugs other than methamphetamine are very complex to make, generally require more skill than the average person

has, and may require special equipment or large quantities of hard to obtain chemicals.

Methamphetamine on the other hand is easily manufactured in small quantities, with ingredients commonly available to anyone, and the manufacturing process does not require specialized equipment or skill. Because many labs are very small, they can easily be located in homes, motels, boats or even in the back of a car.

Also, many of the chemicals involved in methamphetamine production are very volatile and the risk from fire or explosion is very high. Even after the gross contamination is removed from a residence, residual contamination may be a concern because of chronic low-dose exposure, especially to small children.

Q. What are the most serious environmental consequences of meth labs?

A. Fire is a large concern when dealing with meth labs - 25% to 30% of meth labs are discovered when they explode or catch fire. Further, each pound of meth produced leaves behind five or six pounds of toxic waste. Meth cooks often pour leftover chemicals and byproduct sludge down drains in nearby plumbing, storm drains, or directly onto the ground. Chlorinated solvents and other toxic byproducts used to make meth pose long-term hazards because they can persist in soil and groundwater for years. Clean-up costs are exorbitant because solvent contaminated soil usually must be incinerated.

Q. I want to use the PID or FID alternative for VOC testing. Who is a Qualified Person and where how can I contact them?

Illegal Drug Lab Decontamination and Certification

Frequently Asked Questions

CLEANUP AND SAMPLING

The goal of cleanup is to reduce residual contaminants, especially meth, to below the detection level of the required sampling equipment or below the established fit-for-use standard.

A. A list of Qualified Persons can be found on the ADEC Contaminated Sites web page at: <http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/csp/gp.asp>

Remember! VOC sampling should be done before installation of new carpeting, furniture, drapes, etc as they may give off gases that can be registered on the test equipment.

Q. I just installed new carpet in my rental property. Do I have to remove it?

A. Carpeting in an area that is heavily contaminated must be removed. While it is possible to clean carpeting in an area that has not been designated as heavily contaminated, it must be cleaned and sampled in accordance with the *Guidance and Standards for Cleanup of Illegal Drug-Manufacturing Sites*. A property owner must weigh the expense of cleaning and sampling the carpet against the replacement. Often times, the expense of cleaning, sampling and sample analysis may be more expensive than total carpet replacement.

Q. I want to field screen my property to ensure decontamination was sufficient prior to gathering and submitting the more costly samples for lab analysis. What screening methods are available for use?

There are several different products that can be used to field screen a property before final sampling is done. The following products were found available via the internet:

Mistral (<http://www.drugscreen.com.au/mistral>);

Inspection Perfection, Inc. (<http://www.inspection-perfection.com/main/pages.htm>) ;

Accutest (<http://www.accutest.net/products/drug-detection-ftk.php>)

Shopworks

(<http://www.shopworks.com/structuralnarcotics>)

The use of field screening is solely at the property owner's discretion and is identified within the guidance as a courtesy to the property owner. The department does not require or endorse a specific field screening product or technique be used. It is very important for the property owner to understand that the use of a field screening product does not eliminate the requirement for compliance with the required testing and laboratory analyses identified within Part 4 of the Department's *Guidance and Standards for Cleanup of Illegal Drug Manufacturing Sites*. These testing and sampling procedures are required for an owner to certify that their property has met 'fit-for-use' standards.

Kits should be ordered early if you anticipate using them for fielding screening a property as shipping delays may occur due to the nature of the product. Shipping arrangements should be coordinated with the manufacturer or supplier. Additionally, it is recommended that the manufacturer be consulted regarding situations in which their product may be most useful and the products limitations.

Illegal Drug Lab Decontamination and Certification *Frequently Asked Questions*

BUYERS, SELLERS, AND RENTERS

Q. How can I determine if the house or apartment I am renting was a meth lab?

A. Beginning in February 2005, houses, apartments, motel/hotel rooms, and other structures determined by law enforcement personnel to have been used as meth labs are required to be listed on a DEC website. This listing is kept on the State's website until the owner of the property has certified that the property has been cleaned and meets the state's fit-for-use standards.

AS 46.03.500

If you suspect a house or apartment has been used as a drug lab prior to February 2005, you should contact local law enforcement personnel and neighbors to determine if the property was used as a drug lab.

Q. Does the landlord have to notify a renter that a unit was used as a drug lab?

A. A landlord is required by statute to maintain premises fit-for-use (AS 34.03.100). If a drug lab was located in a rental unit and the landlord has conducted a clean up and can certify that the rental unit or property meets established cleanup standards, they are not required by statute to disclose that the premise was used as a drug lab.

However, the landlord may want to consider disclosing the nature of the property, weighing the benefits of informing prospective tenants in consideration of their right to know. A property owner may want to consult legal council to evaluate the most prudent disclosure practices to protect themselves from future civil litigation.

Q. I want to sell my property that was determined to be an illegal drug lab. Do I have to tell prospective buyers that the property was determined to be an illegal meth lab and has not been cleaned up or met fit for use standards?

A. A property owner may not transfer or sell to another person a property determined to be an illegal drug lab until determined to be fit for use **UNLESS** full written disclosure is made to the prospective transferee or purchaser that the property has been determined to be an illegal drug manufacturing site and the property has not been determined to be fit for use. The disclosure is to be attached to the earnest money receipt, if any, and shall accompany the transfer or sale document. The disclosure is not considered to be part of the transfer or sale document, however, and may not be recorded. The property continues to be subject to the same restrictions as any property not determined to be fit for use. (AS 46.03.510. Restrictions on property.)



Q. My neighbor was arrested for making methamphetamine – how does it affect me?

A. If you live in an apartment building or duplex there is a potential your residence may be contaminated. Units that share a common ventilation system, common area or a common wall

Illegal Drug Lab Decontamination and Certification

Frequently Asked Questions

BUYERS, SELLERS, AND RENTERS

are the most likely to have been contaminated. You should talk to your landlord if you have concerns.

Some people making illegal drugs will dispose of the waste products on the ground. If this is suspected, ADEC should be notified. If there is a water well on the property, it should be tested.

Q. I am buying a house (apartment bldg, lodging). Does the seller have to disclose if there was a drug lab in the house?

A. An owner of the property can legally sell a property that was the site of a drug lab without conducting a clean up of the property **if** the seller discloses this information prior to the sale. AS 46.03.510(b).

If an owner of the property has cleaned up the property and has certified that the property meets fit for use standards, the property owner is not required by law to disclose that it was determined to be a former meth lab. All properties certified by the owner as meeting the fit for use standards are removed from the ADEC website listing.

If you suspect that a drug lab was located in the property you are buying, you should check the ADEC drug lab list at the web site or you can call the ADEC office for information.