

Guidelines for Cleaning Up Former Methamphetamine Labs

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Bureau of Community and Environmental Health
Indoor Environment Program

Purpose of this Document

The information provided in this document is intended as general guidance for property owners, landlords, tenants, hotel/motel owners, contractors and the general public to assist in cleaning up properties listed as clandestine drug laboratory sites. It is not meant to modify or replace local and federal codes or requirements.

Although methamphetamine (meth) is not the only drug manufactured in clandestine drug labs, meth labs are the most common and will be the focus of this document.

Neither this nor any other guidance provides science-based advice for removal of all potential risk to human health. This guidance will be revised as more research and practice reveals a better understanding of meth chemicals, testing, and remediation.

Introduction

In 2005, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare was given authority by the state legislature to develop standards for the cleanup of residential properties used as clandestine drug laboratories and to develop a list where properties will be added to and removed from a Clandestine Drug Laboratory Site Property List.

When a property is identified by law enforcement as a clandestine drug laboratory, the property will be posted and the law enforcement agency will notify the property owner and IDHW using an approved notification form. IDHW will then place that property on a Clandestine Drug Laboratory Site Property List. The property owner will then be responsible for:

- Ensuring that the property remains vacant until it is either cleaned or demolished and removed from IDHW's Clandestine Drug Laboratory Site Property List.
- Ensuring that the cleanup standard for meth is met or the property is demolished.
- Ensuring that verification of cleanup is conducted by a qualified industrial hygienist through clearance sampling.
- Providing IDHW with an original or certified copy of the qualified industrial hygienist's final report verifying that the property has been cleaned up according to the established standard, or documentation that the property has been demolished.

Property owners may choose to hire a cleanup contractor, conduct the cleanup themselves or demolish the property. If the property owner chooses to demolish the property, he or she must ensure that local, state and federal laws and regulations are met and that IDHW is notified upon demolition so that the property can be removed from the Clandestine Drug Laboratory Site Property List. Contact your city or county office for information on demolition laws and regulations in your area.

If the property owner chooses to clean up the property himself/herself or hires a cleanup contractor, clearance sampling must be conducted by a qualified industrial hygienist to ensure that the property has been cleaned according to the standard. A list of cleanup contractors and qualified industrial hygienists can be found on IDHW's website at www.healthy.idaho.gov.

Cleanup Standard

The levels of meth residue left behind after cooking are used as an indicator of surface contamination. The current indoor cleanup level for meth in Idaho is point one micrograms per one hundred square centimeters (0.1 µg/100cm²). Properties must meet this standard in order to be removed from IDHW's Clandestine Drug Laboratory Site Property List. This standard is based on what is believed to be conservative and protective and at the same time achievable for cleanup contractors or property owners.

Why Property Cleanup is Important

Properties used to make meth will usually be found with a lab-like setting; including containers of chemicals, heat sources, and various types of lab equipment. Typically, after a lab is discovered by law enforcement, the bulk of any lab-related debris, such as chemicals and containers is removed. However, it is still possible that a small amount of contamination may have been left behind on surfaces, sinks, drains, ventilation systems, and in absorbent materials such as carpets and upholstered furniture. Though usually found in small amounts, meth lab contaminants may pose health threats to persons exposed to them.

The safest way to clean up a former meth lab is to hire an environmental contractor trained in hazardous waste removal and cleanup. Property owners who choose to conduct the cleanup themselves should be aware of possible contamination and hazards and wear clothing such as gloves, long sleeves, eye protection, and breathing protection during cleaning.

Cleanup Guidelines

Air out the property

After law enforcement officials seize a former meth lab, professionals trained to handle hazardous materials are generally called in to remove lab waste and bulk chemicals. During this removal, every effort should have been made to air out the property for the safety of the removal crew. This short term ventilation may not be enough to clear out all air contaminants. Therefore, be sure the property is vented for several days before cleaning and then maintain good ventilation throughout the cleanup of the property.

Contamination removal and disposal

When meth is cooked, chemical vapors can spread and absorb into nearby materials. Spilled chemicals, supplies, and equipment can further contaminate items. Disposal of porous materials that are visibly contaminated and/or stained such as carpeting, drapes, clothing, etc., is required unless a qualified industrial hygienist certifies that the porous materials may remain on the property (Section 300, IDAPA 16.02.24). Contaminated items should be double-bagged, and disposed of in a local landfill. All gloves, rags, and clothing in contact with contamination (including shoes) should be removed before leaving the house and disposed of with the other items. Before taking waste to a landfill, the facility should be notified that the waste is from a former meth lab so they can take measures to handle it properly.

Porous materials such as carpets and upholstered furniture that are not required to be disposed (as evaluated by the qualified industrial hygienist) can be vacuumed using a machine equipped with a HEPA filtration system, followed by (at least one) hot water detergent scrubbing and extraction. When washable materials such as lined curtains are not heavily contaminated, dry-cleaning may be permissible. However, you should notify the dry cleaner that these items are from a former meth lab so they can take any necessary handling precautions. Items such as clothing, that are not visibly stained, can be laundered twice to remove any remaining chemicals. Most non-porous and semi-porous items can be cleaned using household detergent and water.

For costly items (e.g., new or expensive carpeting or draperies), cleaning may be an acceptable course of action, based on the evaluation of the qualified industrial hygienist.

If you find suspicious containers or lab equipment on the property, do not handle them yourself. Leave the area and contact your local law enforcement agency or fire department. Some items might have been overlooked during the initial seizure of the property. If a hazardous materials cleanup team has searched the property, the items have most likely been identified and are not dangerous. However, some properties may not have been searched or some items may have been overlooked in the debris or confusion.

Note: A significant hazard when cleaning a meth lab can be hypodermic needles. Users who inject meth are much more likely than the average population to have hepatitis or HIV/AIDS. Meth labs frequently have large amounts of trash that can hide carelessly discarded hypodermic needles. Needles have been found in many unlikely places such as in furniture, mixed in with other garbage, on the floor or intentionally hidden in unexpected places for concealment.

Surfaces

Surfaces such as walls, counters, floors, ceilings, etc. can hold contamination from the meth cooking process, especially in those places where the active meth lab existed. Cleaning those areas is very important because of frequent contact with these surfaces such as food preparation.

A triple wash and rinse (each wash followed by a thorough rinse) with household cleaning products should remove almost all remaining contamination. Be careful in the use of bleach since hydrochloric acid, sulfuric acid, or other types of acid may react with bleach and cause dangerous vapors to form. Don't forget to wear gloves, protecting clothing (such as long sleeves), and eye protection. Ventilation of the property should be continued throughout the cleaning process.

Ventilation Systems

Ventilation systems (heating, air conditioning) tend to collect fumes and dust and redistribute them throughout the home. The vents, ductwork, and even the walls and ceilings near ventilation ducts can become contaminated. Replace all of the air filters in the system, remove and clean vents, clean the surfaces near system inlets and outlets, and clean the system's ductwork.

Any ventilation system that is constructed of sheet metal may be HEPA- vacuumed and then washed with detergent and rinsed, repeating two additional times. Plastic ductwork, if readily accessible, may be removed and replaced. If inaccessible, it can be HEPA-vacuumed, washed and rinsed to arms length. Ducts constructed with an internal lining of reinforced fiberglass should be carefully HEPA-vacuumed.

Plumbing

In many properties, waste products generated during meth cooking are dumped down sinks, drains, and toilets. These products can collect in drains, traps, and septic systems and give off fumes. If a strong chemical odor is coming from household plumbing, do not attempt to address the problem yourself. Contact a plumbing contractor for professional assistance. If you suspect the septic tank is contaminated, contact your local health department. If you suspect your yard may be contaminated, contact the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

Repainting

When a surface has been cleaned, painting that surface should be considered, especially where contamination was found or suspected. Painting the surface puts a barrier between the contamination and anyone who may come in contact with those surfaces. When paint is applied,

the enclosed area should be allowed to dry for the time stipulated by the manufacturer. These areas should be monitored to ensure that the contamination is contained. If staining, odors or discoloration appear after the coating dries, removal and replacement of that surface section may be necessary.

Clearance Sampling

Whether the property owner chooses to clean up the property themselves or hires a cleanup contractor, clearance sampling must be conducted by a qualified industrial hygienist to ensure that the property has been cleaned according to the standard. The current indoor cleanup level for meth in Idaho is point one micrograms per one hundred square centimeters (0.1 µg/100cm²). A list of qualified industrial hygienists can be found on the IDHW website at www.healthy.idaho.gov.

Note: If a contractor was used to conduct the cleanup, the qualified industrial hygienist conducting the clearance sampling MUST be independent of the company or individual conducting the cleanup.

Summary of Recommended Steps

- Air out the property before and during cleanup.
- Remove all unnecessary items and dispose of them.
- Remove visibly contaminated items or items that have an odor.
- Clean all surfaces using household cleaning methods and wear proper personal protection
- Clean the ventilation system.
- Leave the plumbing cleaning up to the experts.
- Air out the property for three to five days after cleanup.
- If odor or staining remains, have your home evaluated by a professional.
- Have clearance sampling conducted by a qualified industrial hygienist.

Removal from the Contaminated Property List

In order for a property to be removed from IDHW's Clandestine Drug Laboratory Site Property List, the property owner must send IDHW an original or certified copy of the final report from the qualified industrial hygienist showing that the property has been cleaned up to meet the standards, or submit documentation establishing that the property has been fully and lawfully demolished and disposed of in compliance with local, state and federal laws and regulations. The final report from the qualified industrial hygienist must include at least the following information:

- The property description including physical street address (apartment or motel number, if applicable), city, zip code, legal description, ownership and number and type of structures present.
- Documentation of sampling procedures in accordance with the requirements under Section 400 of the IDHW rules (IDAPA 16.02.24).
- Analytical results from a laboratory as specified in Section 400 of the IDHW rules (IDAPA 16.02.24).

- Qualified industrial hygienist statement of qualifications, including professional certification or documentation.
- A signed certification statement from the qualified industrial hygienist stating: "I certify that the cleanup standard established by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare has been met as evidenced by testing that I conducted."

Once the property has either been cleaned or demolished, IDHW will remove the property from the Clandestine Drug Laboratory Site Property List and will issue the property owner a letter/certificate of delisting. The letter/certificate will include the date the property was listed as a clandestine drug laboratory site and the date the property was delisted.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about the cleanup guidelines, please contact the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Bureau of Community and Environmental Health, at 334-5717 or 1-800-445-8647 or bceh@idhw.state.id.us.