

So You Are The Owner of Property Used as a Meth Lab, Now What?

What is Methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine is a drug; the most powerful central nervous system stimulant known to man. It has other names, such as “meth,” “crank,” “speed” and “ice,” just to name a few. It is a highly addictive substance. Users may become hooked after just one use. Meth can be found in the form of pills, capsules, powder, or chunks. It can be smoked/inhaled, snorted, injected or eaten.

How is meth made?

Meth is easily made with materials that are common and readily available. There are several techniques used to make meth. All of these processes use a variety of chemicals including solvents, metals, salts and corrosives (acids). During the drug manufacturing process (cooking), many additional compounds and by-products are made. The fumes, vapors and spillage associated with cooking can be toxic and may be considered hazardous waste.

Where do meth labs occur?

Almost any property can be used as a meth lab. The more popular types are: rental properties, motel rooms, storage units, campgrounds, and outbuildings in rural areas. A meth lab can easily be transported in the trunk of a car, which makes it portable to almost any location.

What happens when a lab is busted?

When a meth lab is found, the local law enforcement agencies and hazardous waste personnel come in to collect and list all evidence of the lab. This includes equipment, chemicals and other materials used in the lab.

The local Health Department is also notified of the drug lab. They are required by law to post the location of the lab with a sign indicating that the property may be contaminated. In the following weeks, an investigation is conducted to determine whether the structure is “fit” for human use. Considered in this determination are the following:

- the extent and length of time meth manufacturing was carried on in the structure,
- exactly what chemicals were removed, and
- where the chemicals were found.

After this investigation, the property may be declared “Unfit For Use.” A notice will be posted on the property, sent to the property owner(s) and recorded on the title of the property.

What does “Unfit For Use” mean?

It means that the property cannot be used until it has been cleaned up to the state’s threshold for contamination.

Entry is prohibited.

Who is responsible for cleaning up the property?

The owner of the property is ultimately responsible for clean up. The owner may also be legally responsible if persons get sick after they re-enter a contaminated building.

If the police take the equipment and materials used to make meth, why do I have to clean up the property?

During the manufacturing process, it is possible that contamination from dust, powder and vapors were left on surfaces and in absorbent materials (carpets, furniture, drapes, wallboard, ceiling tiles), sinks, drains and ventilation systems. The soil or groundwater may also become contaminated if chemicals were spilled or dumped on the ground or disposed in a septic system.

How is a property cleaned up?

The first step in clean up is to determine if the property is contaminated above the state’s clean up threshold of one microgram per square foot (1 µg/ft²). Testing/sampling must be done by a certified cleanup contractor. Before any cleanup occurs, a written cleanup plan must be filed with, and approved by, the Health Department.

To find certified contractors in your area, contact your local health department or the Washington State Department of Health, Clandestine Drug Lab Program or download the CERTIFIED CONTRACTOR LIST from the internet at www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/cdl.htm

How much will it cost?

A certified contractor will give you a bid on the cost of clean up. The size of the structure and extent of the contamination will effect the cost.

How long will it take to get the property cleaned up?

While cleanup itself may take a few days to a week, contractors may have a busy schedule and it may take several weeks for them to get to you.

Can I go back onto the property to get personal belongings?

Yes, but only after law enforcement officers have completed their investigation. Until the property has been determined “unfit for use” you may enter the property and retrieve personal belongings AT YOUR OWN RISK. Open the windows and doors to increase ventilation prior to entering and thereby reduce the risk of inhaling dangerous fumes. Keep in mind that the belongings you retrieve may be contaminated and should be handled carefully.

QUESTIONS?

Benton-Franklin Health District
509-460-4205

Website: <http://www.bfhd.wa.gov>

Washington State Department of Health
360-236-3381

Website: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/cdl.htm>

To report a suspected lab:

Kennewick and Richland 509-628-0333

Pasco 509-545-3510

What health risks are associated with the property?

While the amount of contamination may be small, it still poses serious health risks to the persons exposed.

The potential health effects depend on:

- the specific chemicals of exposure,
- how much chemical a person was exposed to,
- how long a person was exposed, and
- the health condition of the person exposed.

The most common and persistent contaminate is the meth itself. Exposure to meth residue may cause symptoms similar to those experienced by the meth users themselves.

People who enter a drug lab after a police bust has been completed but before it has been properly cleaned and ventilated, may feel headaches, nausea, dizziness and fatigue. These symptoms usually go away after several hours.

People who enter a lab during, or immediately after, a drug bust may experience shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, dizziness, lack of coordination, burns and even death.

Keep in mind that you may find used needles and flammable liquids on the property that can be hazardous to your health.

How can I find out if a property was used as a meth lab?

Your local health department has a list of homes in Benton and Franklin Counties that were found to contain chemicals commonly used to produce meth during a law enforcement action. You may call the Benton-Franklin Health District to find out if a property is on the list and if it was cleaned up properly. Washington State also provides a web site with a list of drug labs that were found.

What Are Some Signs That a Property is Being Used as a Meth Lab?

- Strong odor of solvents
- Residences with the windows blacked out
- Iodine or chemical stained bathroom or kitchen fixtures
- Renters who pay in cash
- Increased activity at night
- Excessive trash

How Do I Prevent My Property From Being Damaged?

- Interview prospective renters in person,
- Do a background check, check references thoroughly,
- Strongly advise them as to what can be stored on the rented property (i.e., a commercial painter could be storing paint and solvents which are a fire hazard), and
- Frequently check on your property.

My neighbor's home was busted as a meth lab, how does this affect my health?

It probably will not affect you, but if you have health concerns, talk to your doctor.

Who to Call:

To report a suspected lab:

Local Law Enforcement, Non Emergency
Kennewick and Richland 628-0333
Pasco 545-3510

Concerns about the health effects of meth:

Washington State Department of Health,
360-236-3381
www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/cdl.htm

General questions about drug labs and clean up resources:

Benton-Franklin Health District
Environmental Health Division
7102 W. Okanogan Place
Kennewick, WA 99336
(509) 460-4205
www.bfhd.wa.gov

BFHD-E-0072 (Rev. 7/08)

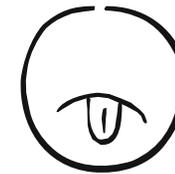
Meth Lab Cleanup

home safety series

WARNING!

Contaminated Property

Dangerous chemicals Have Been Removed From These Premises.
Their Toxic residues may still remain.



ENTRY IS UNSAFE!

For Information Contact Your Local Health Agency

www.bfhd.wa.gov

