

Guidelines for

Cleaning up Former Methamphetamine Labs



**Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
Bureau of Environmental Epidemiology**

Why are we producing these guidelines?

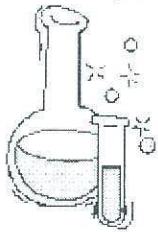
Meth labs, used to make the illegal drug methamphetamine, are discovered in houses, apartments, motel rooms, sheds, and even motor vehicles. In 1999, federal, state and local authorities were involved in the seizure of more than 900 labs in Missouri alone, and the number of meth labs seized by law enforcement agencies increases each year.

As agencies seek to restrict the products needed to make methamphetamine, the methods and the locations of its production are changing. This adds to the difficulty health and environmental agencies face in assessing meth related health risks.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services' (DHSS) Bureau of Environmental Epidemiology has created these basic guidelines to assist property owners and the general public in cleaning up former meth lab properties.

How can you find out if a property has been used to make meth?

Currently, there is no comprehensive method for tracking or listing properties that were used as meth labs. You should call your local law enforcement agency to confirm that a seizure of chemicals took place on the property, and to obtain the name of any hazardous materials contractor who may have removed materials. The contractor should have information on what chemicals were present on the property. Additional information may be obtained from your county health department, fire department, or the owner of the property.



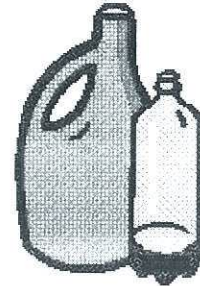
Why the concern about cleaning up illegal meth labs?

Properties used to produce 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 possible a small amount of contamination is left on surfaces and in absorbent materials (carpets, furniture), sinks, drains, and ventilation systems. Though found in small amounts, meth lab contaminants may pose health threats to persons exposed to them.



What are the meth lab contaminants?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), working with DHSS, has been seeking to identify contaminants found at former meth lab properties throughout Missouri. There are different “recipes” for making meth, each using different ingredients. The making of meth can also be performed in different stages at different locations. EPA has collected environmental samples from properties after meth labs were seized. EPA concentrated its sampling efforts on areas to which a resident would most likely come in contact with contamination, such as a property’s surfaces and indoor air – but EPA also collected samples from containers, soil, drains, filters, ductwork, etc.



DHSS has examined sampling results and found many chemicals, not related to meth labs, that can be found in most homes. The more common household chemicals can be found in carpet, household cleaners, and paints. These chemicals include: benzene, methylene chloride, trichloroethane, and toluene. It is suspected that meth-related chemicals include solvents such as paint thinners, phosphorous from matches and road flares, lithium strips from lithium batteries, sodium metal, and anhydrous ammonia which is often found in insulated coolers and small propane cylinders.

What are possible health effects from exposure to meth lab contaminants?



Many of the contaminants present during meth’s cooking process can be harmful if someone is exposed to them. These contaminants can cause health problems including respiratory (breathing) problems, skin and eye irritation, headaches, nausea, and dizziness. Acute (short-term) exposures to high concentrations of some of these chemicals, such as those law enforcement officers face when they

first enter a lab, can cause severe health problems including lung damage and burns to different parts of the body.

There is little known about the health effects from chronic (long-term) exposure to contaminants left behind after a meth lab is dismantled. Until the contaminants have been identified, their quantities measured, and their health effects known, DHSS advises property owners to exercise caution and use the safest possible cleaning practices in dealing with a former meth lab property and any possible remaining contamination.