

# Illegal Drug Lab Decontamination and Certification

## Frequently Asked Questions

### CLEANUP AND SAMPLING

#### Q. Who is responsible for the property cleanup?

A. Property owners are responsible to ensure the proper clean up and testing of a methamphetamine (meth) 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.

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) strongly encourages the hiring of qualified cleanup contractors to conduct cleanup and decontamination of the property.

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

A. The manufacturing of any illegal drug presents a hazard to the public. However, drugs other than meth 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.

Meth 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 meth 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.

**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.**

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**Q. I want to use the photo ionization detector (PID) or flame ionization detector (FID) alternative for volatile organic compound (VOC) testing. Who is a Qualified Person and how can I contact them?**

**A.** A qualified person is one who actively practices environmental science, has a bachelor's degree or equivalent from a nationally or internationally accredited postsecondary institution, and has at least one year of professional experience. A detailed definition of a qualified person can be found in the 18 Alaska Administrative Code (AAC) 75.990(100).

Contact an environmental consulting group to find a person meeting the definition above.

**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.mistralgroup.com/SEC\\_drug.asp](http://www.mistralgroup.com/SEC_drug.asp));
- **Inspection Perfection, Inc.**  
(<http://www.inspection-perfection.com/main/pages/order%20test.htm>);
- **Accutest**  
(<http://www.accutest.net/products/drug-detection-ftk.php>)
- **Structural Narcotics Detection Service**  
(<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 Section 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.