

## ***What if a methamphetamine laboratory is found on my property?***

### **FAQ for N.C. Property Owners**

Illegal methamphetamine (meth) labs have been found in many North Carolina counties. Law enforcement officers have discovered meth labs in homes, apartments, hotels, cars and outdoor locations. These labs pose multiple dangers to both public health and the environment. In many cases, children are found living in homes where meth is made. Children, especially the very young, are at particular risk from exposure to the chemicals in those labs.

As of April 1, 2005, all newly discovered and former meth lab properties must be cleaned prior to re-occupancy in accordance with North Carolina General Statute 130A-284. The provisions of this law provide a reasonable and practical approach to the cleanup of a meth lab to protect human health and the environment.

Here are answers to some common questions about meth labs and their cleanup.

#### **Q. What kinds of chemicals and equipment are used to make meth?**

- A. Meth can be easily made using several different chemical “recipes,” but all require one of three chemicals: ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or phenylpropanolamine. Other ingredients that may be used in the manufacturing process include iodine, red phosphorous, hydrochloric acid, ether, camp fuel, paint thinner, drain cleaner, acetone, battery acid, lithium batteries and anhydrous ammonia.

Meth lab “cooks” combine common household items to use in place of real laboratory equipment, including jars, coffee filters, hot plates, plastic bottles, blenders, pillowcases, tubing, funnels, large plastic storage containers, coolers, and gas cans.

#### **Q. Is a meth lab dangerous?**

- A. The greatest risk surrounding these labs is the dangerous nature of the persons making and using this illegal drug. ***Individuals who believe they have discovered a drug lab should immediately notify law enforcement and should not enter the suspected area.***

The making of methamphetamine creates many hazards. Toxic chemical vapors, spills, explosions, and fires make meth labs dangerous places. Meth cooks, their families, and first responders are often the ones who are injured. Waste dumped from meth labs can expose people to toxic chemicals. Even people picking up litter on the side of a road have been injured from meth lab waste dumps.

After the lab has been busted, many of the hazards are removed by law enforcement. However, chemical and drug residues remain, contaminating the property. If the property is not cleaned up properly, these residues can cause adverse health effects in future residents, particularly babies and young children who are in close contact with the

floor and other contaminated surfaces. Infants and children may be harmed by exposure to these residues through ingestion, inhalation and direct skin exposure.

**Q. Can I still use my building?**

- A.** The property cannot be used unless it has been cleaned according to the North Carolina law.

No one should enter a facility that has been used as a meth lab unless they are wearing appropriate personal protection equipment. Symptoms such as headache, nausea, dizziness, and fatigue have occurred in people who entered a meth lab after the bust was completed, but before the property was properly cleaned and ventilated. If you experience any of these symptoms, contact your health care provider.

**Q. Who is responsible for cleaning up the property?**

- A.** The owner of the property is ultimately responsible for the cleanup.

**Q. As the owner, what do I have to do?**

- A.** North Carolina rules require decontamination of properties prior to re-occupancy. The bulk of any lab-related debris such as chemicals and containers found at a meth lab will be removed in accordance with the Drug Enforcement Administration requirements as directed by the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation (NC SBI). However, smaller amounts of methamphetamine and hazardous chemical residues may remain and may have contaminated surfaces, drains, sinks, ventilation systems and absorbent materials (couches, carpets, beds, etc.).

Preparing the property for re-occupancy includes cleaning to remove chemical residues, debris, and possibly furnishings and appliances. Although the property owner can conduct this decontamination process, consider using a trained cleanup contractor. Also, in many cases, it may be more cost-effective to dispose of items rather than to clean (decontaminate) them. Complete structure demolition may also be an option.

**Q. What are specific requirements of the law?**

- A.** North Carolina General Statute [130A-284](#) [[http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter\\_130A/GS\\_130A-284.html](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter_130A/GS_130A-284.html)] and Administrative Rules 10A NCAC 41D.0101-.0105 [<http://reports.oah.state.nc.us/ncac/title%2010a%20-%20health%20and%20human%20services/chapter%2041%20-%20epidemiology%20health/subchapter%20d/subchapter%20d%20rules.doc>] require:
- Submittal of a Pre-Decontamination Assessment to the local health department [<http://www.ncalhd.org/county.htm>];
  - Disposal of appliances (such as refrigerators, stoves, hot plates, microwaves, toaster ovens, and coffee makers, etc.) used in the manufacture of methamphetamine or storage of associated chemicals;
  - Disposal of non-machine-washable porous materials, such as upholstered furniture and mattresses;
  - Removal of all carpet and padding;

- Cleaning, painting and/or removal of non-porous materials (walls, ceiling, floors);
- Removal of excessively stained plumbing fixtures; and
- Provision of written documentation to the local health department.

**Q. What does the local health department do?**

- A.** The N.C. State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) notifies the local health department (LHD) of a meth lab seizure in that county. The LHD notifies the property owner of the N.C. rules, which require decontamination of properties prior to re-occupancy. The LHD receives and reviews the decontamination documents provided to them by the property owner, and retains the documents for three years. The LHD may inspect the property, although it is not required to do so.

**Q. Is sampling / testing the property necessary? Who should do it?**

- A.** North Carolina recommends a practical approach to decontamination, based on cleanup and disposal of contaminated items. North Carolina regulations do not require sampling or testing for methamphetamine contamination at former meth labs, as there is not a national standard for determining safe or unsafe levels of meth residue present at a site. However, depending on which methamphetamine manufacturing method was used, it may be necessary to test for contaminants such as mercury and lead. Also, any portions of the structure (walls, floors or ceilings) damaged or removed need to be evaluated for asbestos and lead-based paint prior to disturbing the property. If any testing is conducted, it should be done by an experienced and licensed private environmental consulting firm. See websites below for additional information about testing.

**Q. Is it possible to find out if a property has been used as a meth lab?**

- A.** Your local law enforcement agency should have the most complete record of former meth labs seized in the area. Each county health department maintains a list of properties in their county from information received from the N.C. SBI. In addition, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) maintains a National Clandestine Laboratory Register (<http://www.justice.gov/dea/clan-lab/clan-lab.shtml>) of meth lab properties in each state on their website.

**Q. Where can I get more information?**

- A.** More information concerning methamphetamine labs can be found at the following websites:
- N.C. DPH: Methamphetamine Labs ([http://epi.ncpublichealth.info/epi\\_test/oe\\_test/a\\_z/meth.html](http://epi.ncpublichealth.info/epi_test/oe_test/a_z/meth.html))
  - U.S. EPA: Voluntary Guidelines for Methamphetamine Cleanup (<http://www.epa.gov/oem/methlab.htm>)
  - N.C. Department of Justice: STOP METH (<http://www.ncdoj.gov/getdoc/9bcd8a04-b119-480c-82ae-2ac1bf700ae6/Stop-Meth.aspx>)