

# CLANDESTINE METHAMPHETAMINE LABORATORIES

HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

HAZARD EVALUATION AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE



HAWAII STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
HEALTHY PEOPLE - HEALTHY COMMUNITIES - HEALTHY ISLANDS

## METH LAB CLEANUP

### Background and Introduction

Through the years, with the growth of methamphetamine (meth) in Hawaii, we saw an increase in the number of properties contaminated by illegal meth laboratories. Property owners were experiencing rental housing with unknown levels of contamination as a result of the properties being used as clandestine meth laboratories. Hawaii, like many other states, was without any guidance for cleaning up the residual contamination from these illegal laboratories.

The 2006 Legislature passed and Governor Linda Lingle signed into law, Act 170, in response to concern over the potential health and environmental effects associated with residual methamphetamine left in the environment after the illegal activity.

Act 170, Relating to Decontamination of Illegal Drug Manufacturing Sites, was signed into law on June 5, 2006. The act calls for statewide guidelines and procedures to properly decontaminate and cleanup illegal clandestine (clan) meth manufacturing sites as well as the protection of the State's first responder community.

### Summary of the Interim Guidelines and Procedures

1. Enforcement activities are handled by local and/or federal law enforcement agencies conducting the criminal investigation;
2. These enforcement agencies provide a brief report to the Hawaii Department of Health (HDOH) Hazard Evaluation and Emergency Response (HEER) Office of the description of the operation of the illegal laboratory and the nature of activities to complete the transition process between the enforcement and the environmental clean-up process;
3. The HEER Office notifies the property owner and initiates the remedial cleanup process. **The property owner alone has the responsibility for the clean-up and should hire a qualified environmental consultant.** The HEER Office provides oversight of the clean-up of the illegal laboratory. When the property meets HDOH the requirements, a 'no further action' (NFA) letter will be issued to the property owner.

## METH FACTS

### What is it?

Methamphetamine, also known as "meth," "speed," "crank," "crystal" and "ice," is a very powerful man-made drug that affects the central nervous system. It is illegally made, often in makeshift laboratories set up in rented property such as apartments or hotel rooms. After the laboratory is shut down, the property is often contaminated with hazardous chemicals. No one should enter a facility that has been used as a meth lab unless they are wearing appropriate personal protection equipment. This fact sheet will answer some general questions about meth labs and cleanup.

The greatest risk surrounding these labs is the dangerous nature of the persons making and using this illegal drug. This fact sheet assumes that law enforcement authorities have arrested the persons operating the meth lab or that these persons have vacated the property.

### What's in this stuff?

There are many ways to synthesize meth from a wide range of chemicals. The active ingredient is derived from one of three chemicals, ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, or phenylpropanolamine. Other chemicals used in the synthesizing process include iodine, red phosphorous, hydrochloric acid, ether, Coleman fuel, paint thinner, acetone, drain cleaner, battery acid, lithium batteries, hydriodic acid, and anhydrous ammonia.

In Hawaii, crystal methamphetamine is more commonly abused than powdered methamphetamine. Crystal methamphetamine conversion laboratories are more prevalent than production laboratories.

Many of the chemicals used to produce meth are highly volatile and extremely toxic, and can cause death or injury to the lab operators and their children, law enforcement officials, and first responders to lab explosions, and great harm to the environment—one pound of meth is estimated to produce five or six pounds of toxic waste.

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## METH LAB CLEANUP (cont.)

### Questions and Answers



- Q. What Happens Now?**
- A. The Hawaii Department of Health (HDOH) HEER Office determines whether or not the property is safe for occupancy.
- Q. What does “unsafe” mean?**
- A. It means the property has to be cleaned up before it can be reused. Occupancy is prohibited.
- Q. What happens if the HDOH designates my property “unsafe for occupancy”?**
- A. You cannot occupy the property until samples demonstrate the property has been cleaned up by a qualified environmental cleanup contractor.
- Q. How do I clean up the property?**
- A. Refer to the Interim Guidelines and Procedures for Decontamination and Clean-up of Illegal Clandestine Laboratory Methamphetamine Manufacturing Sites.  
<http://www.hawaii.gov/health/environmental/hazard/pdf/methlabprotocol.pdf>
- Q. What is the state cleanup threshold for meth?**
- A. The cleanup threshold for meth is 0.1 micrograms/100 square centimeters.
- Q. Who will demonstrate that the property is clean?**
- A. You will need to hire a qualified environmental professional to collect and analyze wipe samples.
- Q. How much will this cost?**
- A. An environmental contractor will give you a bid on the cost of clean-up. It can range between \$2500 to \$25000.
- Q. Who is responsible for the cost of cleanup?**
- A. The property owner alone has the responsibility for the clean-up and should hire a qualified environmental consultant.
- Q. Can I go back onto my property to get personal belongings?**
- A. Yes, until the property has been determined “unsafe for occupancy” you may enter the property and retrieve personal belongings, at your own risk. Open windows and doors to increase ventilation and reduce the risk of inhaling dangerous vapors.

## METH FACTS (cont.)

Some materials in a building can absorb chemicals. Examples include carpeting, wall board, ceiling tile, wood and fabric. Furniture or draperies also may become contaminated. If residues enter the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system, other areas in a building can become contaminated. Soil or groundwater may become contaminated if chemicals are disposed of in a septic system or dumped outside.

### What are the health effects of exposure to chemicals used in meth labs?

The potential health effects depend on:

- the specific chemicals to which a person is exposed,
- how much of each chemical to which a person is exposed,
- how long a person is exposed, and
- the health condition of the person being exposed.

Exposure to meth residues may cause symptoms similar to those experienced by meth users.

Exposure to volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as acetone, ether, and Coleman fuel, may cause symptoms such as nose and throat irritation, headaches, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, confusion and breathing difficulties. Benzene is a VOC known to cause cancer.

Acids or bases will cause a burning sensation on the skin and in mucous membranes, and can cause severe eye damage. Exposure to metals and salts can cause a wide range of health effects including respiratory irritation, decreased mental function, anemia, kidney damage and birth defects. Lead and mercury are particularly hazardous.

### Where can I get more information?

Hawaii Department of Health  
Hazard Evaluation and Emergency Response Office  
919 Ala Moana Blvd., 206  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96814  
(808) 586-4249

Hawaii Department of Health website  
<http://healthuser.hawaii.gov/health/environmental/hazard/index.html>