
Clandestine Drug Lab Fact Sheet

The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Narcotics seized 122 clandestine methamphetamine labs in 2002. This number was more than 542% increase from the 19 labs seized in 1998. A growing demand and easy accessibility to the chemicals necessary to make methamphetamine have led to an increase in its production and usage.

The growing meth problem is a threat to the public, law enforcement, firefighters, and hazardous-materials personnel. The production of methamphetamine involves the use of explosive, flammable, and carcinogenic (cancer-causing) chemicals. Any person coming in contact with these chemicals can face a variety of life-threatening symptoms, including chest pains, shortness of breath, dizziness, and burns.

The production of meth is dangerous to those who cook it and use it, but the danger is not limited only to them. Anyone who comes in contact with these labs is exposed to dangers that can produce life-threatening injury, death and destruction of property.

The ease of manufacturing meth has caused a rise in the number of new labs and the creativity of the locations of these new labs. These labs are not always located in a dwelling, and are being found with increasing frequency in vehicles. The advantages to having an easily mobile lab is very appealing to manufacturers of methamphetamine.

Many of the contaminants present during the methamphetamine cooking process can be harmful if someone is simply exposed to the materials in the raw. The cooking process will change the nature of these chemicals making them more volatile. These contaminants can cause health problems including respiratory distress, skin and eye irritation, headaches, dizziness and nausea. Exposure to meth residues may cause symptoms similar to those experienced by meth users. Exposure to volatile organic compounds (VOCs) may include nose and throat irritation, headaches, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, disorientation/confusion, and difficulty breathing.

Benzene, a main ingredient in meth, is known to cause cancer. Acids and/or bases involved in the production of meth can cause a burning sensation on the skin and in mucous membranes, and can cause severe eye damage. Exposure to metals and salts used in making meth can cause a wide range of health problems including respiratory irritation, decreased mental function, anemia, kidney damage, and birth defects.

Different manufacturers of meth use different recipes and cooking methods. These differences can create different and unknown by-products. The unknown is where the real risk and danger lies when dealing with clandestine drug labs. A professional company trained specifically in decontaminating drug labs is the only way to ensure that a site or residence is truly safe for your maintenance personnel, leasing agents, and future tenants.

Tips for Landlords

Ensure application is complete and conduct a background check for:

Rental history

Employment history

Credit report

Criminal background

Meet every adult moving into the unit and require picture identification.

Be aware of renters appearances and behavior.

Make every tenant living in the unit complete an application with full background checks.

Walk the property often and look for signs of clandestine drug labs operation:

Excessive garbage: Specific to making methamphetamine, such as ether, benzene, Toluene/paint thinner containers, Freon, acetone, starting fluid, anhydrous ammonia, Red Devil Lye, hydrochloric acid, propane cylinders, over-the-counter cold tablets (especially Sudafed).

Blackened windows or drawn curtains.

Frequent visitors at all or odd hours.

Paranoid/odd behavior.

Extensive security: Extra deadbolts, bars across doors, never allowing maintenance personnel in the apartment, etc.

Chemical odors: Over 50% of residential drug labs are found on rental property and the property owners are responsible for alerting law enforcement and must bear the burden of the decontamination costs.

When drug dealers operate out of rental property, owners pay a high price:

Loss of rent

Damaged Property

Decline in property values

Dangerous, threatening tenants

Resentful and angry neighbors

Loss of other valued tenants.