



Minnesota Department of Health Fact Sheet

Clandestine Drug Labs Assessment for Food, Beverage and Lodging Establishments

What are the main issues?

Clandestine drug labs have been found in various locations throughout Minnesota including homes, apartments, mobile homes, campgrounds, motel rooms and food service establishments.

The processes for producing drugs like Methamphetamine (Meth) can result in sludge, liquid wastes and volatile chemical wastes that have the potential to contaminate the structure and its contents, the air and the groundwater or soil where they are deposited.

Contamination poses a unique problem when the drug lab is located within a licensed establishment serving the public. A determination must be made whether patrons of a campground, restaurant or motel, or residents of a mobile home park are at risk due to contamination from a clandestine drug lab. If there is evidence that contamination has occurred in food preparation or lodging areas, immediate action must be taken to assure that all or part of the business where contamination has occurred are closed to the public. This may require closure of the establishment to prevent the public from encountering contaminated areas, food, or water.

The drug lab site and surrounding areas must be assessed and a cleanup performed by a company with expertise in performing cleanups of hazardous materials. The assessment may include testing of exposed surfaces for traces of contamination. Assessments must be based on a number of factors, including the degree of contamination, chemicals used, duration of the lab, the costs of cleanup, the value and legal status of the property, local ordinances and professional judgement. The cleanup involves some or all of the following procedures:

- removal of contaminated furnishings, draperies, carpeting and other materials;
- venting of contaminated areas;
- neutralization of acids and bases;
- detergent-water washing of nonporous and semiporous surfaces, such as floors, walls and ceilings; or
- encapsulation or sealing of surfaces with oil-based paint or polyurethane.

Following the cleanup, verification must be obtained from the company performing the cleanup, that the cleanup was performed according to guidelines and rules established by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA).

More specific information regarding cleanup can be obtained from handouts available from the MDH including "Health and Safety Issues Related to Clandestine Drug Labs" and "Minnesota Department of Health General Cleanup Guidelines for Clandestine Drug Labs."

Assessing food establishments:

The assessment should focus on whether food products, food preparation surfaces, or common ventilation and plumbing, may have been contaminated with toxic chemicals. Most chemicals of concern are volatile compounds, metals or caustic materials. Volatile compounds are likely to disperse to other areas of the building. Some may leave residues, but most can be eliminated or reduced through detergent scrubbing and ventilation of affected areas. An assessment of the building should consider:

- what is the proximity of the food preparation and storage area to the lab locations;
- what avenues of contamination exist for the

- food preparation and storage areas from the building heating and ventilation system;
- is there any visual or analytical evidence of lab residues in the food preparation and storage areas; and
- what is the potential for contamination of food products and single service items?

If there is evidence that food products or the water supplies are contaminated and that the public's health may be at risk, the restaurant should be closed until there is assurance that the contamination has been eliminated. Evidence of contamination can include visual or confirmed laboratory results of unacceptable levels of toxic compounds from surfaces in food preparation or storage areas and other areas frequented by the public associated with the licensed facility.

Unless there are residues of contamination evident on cans, bottles or sealed plastic bags of food, these should be considered as safe. Cans and bottles can be washed with a detergent-water solution as a precaution. Single service items in sealed packaging are considered safe, if there is no residue on packaging. Boxes, packages, and single service items should be discarded if there is evidence of contamination on them. Open containers of food and ice should be discarded.

Foods in refrigerators and walk-in refrigerators and freezers may be considered safe, unless there is reason to believe contamination occurred. Contamination would more likely occur to food products if the drug lab was located very close to a kitchen or operated in the kitchen. If this is the case, it may be necessary to close the establishment and discard most if not all foods, including canned and bottled products in the food preparation area and storage areas.

Food preparation and storage rooms, equipment surfaces, floors, walls and ceilings should be washed with a detergent-water solution as a precaution, even if the chances for contamination seem minimal. This may be the case if the restaurant food service is located a significant distance from the lab location, but some contamination may have entered the restaurant from a shared ventilation system. In this case, the ventilation system should also be cleaned.

Assessing lodging establishments:

All rooms and common areas can be exposed to some level of contamination if there is a shared ventilation system. A reasonable assessment of the potentials for contamination should be made, which may include testing of surfaces in areas of the building. All rooms and areas where there is evidence of contamination, must be closed to the public. If contamination is widespread, with most areas of the building being found contaminated, closure of the establishment may be required.

If there is not a shared ventilation system, the cleanup should be able to be restricted to the lab itself and the immediate adjacent area. The procedures for cleanup should follow the general cleanup guidelines of the MDH.

If there is a shared ventilation system or other mechanism for contamination to have spread to other rooms and locations in the lodging establishment, those areas will need to be included in the assessment and cleanup procedures.

Assessing plumbing, water supply and sewage disposal systems:

An assessment needs to be made of the potential for contamination from disposal of chemicals into the plumbing, water supply and sewage disposal system. Contamination in plumbing traps and drains and disposal of hazardous chemicals into a septic tank should be addressed during cleanup in accordance with PCA and MDH rules and guidelines for hazardous chemicals. A private water supply serving the establishment should be sampled if groundwater contamination is suspected.

If there are specific questions and issues that arise, more information can be obtained by contacting MDH staff in the Site Assessment and Consultation Unit at 651/215-0778. Questions about regulation of licensed establishments and food safety should be directed to staff in the Environmental Health Services Section at 651/215-0870. 02/01