

# Remediating meth properties

Guidance on dealing with meth-contaminated buildings will soon be available. Proposed standard NZS 8510 will guide testing and remediation of properties used for the manufacture or use of methamphetamine.

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**IN DECEMBER 2015**, Standards New Zealand received funding under the Criminal Proceeds (Recovery) Act 2009 to develop a standard for testing and remediation of properties used for methamphetamine manufacture or use.

NZS 8510 will provide guidance on methodologies, procedures and other supporting material for a consistent and effective approach to managing the testing and remediation of affected properties and treatment of their contents.

## **Health hazards from meth manufacture**

Methamphetamine, or crystal methamphetamine hydrochloride (pharmaceutically referred to as methylamphetamine or desoxyephedrine), is a powerful and highly addictive synthetic drug.

Methamphetamine is synthesised or 'cooked' in makeshift laboratories, using precursor substances such as ephedrine or pseudoephedrine as key ingredients. Both acute (short-term) and chronic (long-term) health effects can occur from methamphetamine manufacture.

Acute exposure effects may occur from direct contact with the product or waste and inhalation of the product or waste. Burns, tissue irritation and rashes can result from chemical spills and skin contact. Other health effects such as nausea, dizziness and headaches can result from the inhalation of vapours and gases.

### **Buildings become contaminated**

The surrounding environment is also contaminated by the toxic chemicals. This can cause health problems for:

- people who buy a house that has been used to cook methamphetamine or has had methamphetamine users living in it
- tenants who move into a property that is contaminated.

### **Guidance needed for decontamination**

The problem has been growing for some years in New Zealand and overseas. Correspondingly, increasing numbers of companies offer property testing and decontamination services.

There is currently no consistent approach to testing and decontamination, and there is an absence of quality control measures. There is also debate on safe levels of contamination for properties to be reoccupied. The standard will address these issues.

### **Committee set scope of new standard**

The committee developing the standard first met in June. It comprises representatives from various sectors including laboratory and testing companies, remediating companies, local government, central government, property management and accreditation.

It agreed that the scope of the standard will include the following:

- Guidance on methods of sampling and testing of properties and their contents to assess the extent of contamination. It will ensure that sampling is representative, and that testing methods produce reliable and repeatable results, whether using qualitative or quantitative methods, and a consistent approach is used for reporting test results.
- Measures to manage risks to health, well-being, safety and the environment from meth-contaminated material and chemicals used to manufacture methamphetamine.

- Guidance on notifying and recording details of meth-contaminated properties and their decontamination.
- Best-practice procedures including performance criteria for decontaminating and remediating properties and their contents.
- Methods for disposing of materials that cannot be decontaminated.
- Information supporting processes, such as validation or auditing to provide assurance of effectiveness and compliance with relevant legislation or bylaw requirements. This will cover testing, risk assessment, decontamination and property remediation and the disposal of contaminated materials.

### **Structure agreed on**

The proposed structure of the standard will cover:

- preliminary (pre-remediation) assessment of properties, including sampling and testing to assess risks
- guidance on decontamination and remediation of affected properties
- post-remediation sampling and testing to certify properties are safe to occupy
- general matters such as reporting and documentation, competency of operators and roles and responsibilities of agencies
- technical appendices including sampling and testing protocols and health and safety measures
- reference documents.

### **Getting into the detail**

At a second committee meeting in July, the five working groups developing key parts of the standard reported on:

- preliminary assessment, screening, sampling and testing
- decontamination and remediation
- post-remediation sampling and testing
- general matters such as documentation and competency requirements for operators

- technical appendices including sampling and testing protocols.

A presentation by Dr Nick Kim of Massey University included issues such as:

- how risk-based guideline values are developed
- the importance of representative sampling for meth contamination
- reporting requirements
- general quality assurance measures that need to be in place, especially for field testing of properties.

### **Next steps include looking overseas**

The committee will examine other guidelines such as those used in California and Colorado that can be adopted for use in the New Zealand standard.

Standards New Zealand will compile all the working group reports into a first draft of the standard for the committee to further develop into a draft that will be released for public comment.

### **Draft out October, finalised early 2017**

The committee is working towards a draft standard that can be released for public comment in October or November 2016. The exact release date will depend on progress with proposals developed by committee members and the availability of background research on safe exposure levels.

All public comments received by Standards New Zealand on the draft standard will be reviewed by the committee and any changes made before the standard is approved by the Standards Approval Board for publishing in early 2017. ◀

**For more** ▶ Further information on the health effects of exposure to methamphetamine manufacture can be found in the Ministry of Health, 2010 publication, *Guidelines for the remediation of clandestine methamphetamine laboratory sites*.