

RISK CONTROL SERVICES

METHAMPHETAMINE

What is Methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine, commonly referred to as meth, is a powerful and highly addictive stimulant that dramatically affects the central nervous system. Meth users, who typically smoke the drug, but can also ingest, snort, or inject it, experience increased physical activity and talkativeness, decreased appetite, and an overall sense of euphoria. Some of the health risks associated with meth use include extreme weight loss and malnutrition, nausea, sleep problems, aggressiveness, anxiety, confusion, hallucinations, convulsions, increased heart rate, damaged blood vessels, and damage to the liver, kidneys, and lungs. Methamphetamine abuse during pregnancy may result in prenatal complications, increased rates of premature delivery, altered neonatal behavioral patterns, and congenital deformities.

How is meth made?

Meth can be made very cheaply from store-bought ingredients, which contributes to its widespread abuse. Many common household products, most notably over-the-counter cold medicines containing pseudoephedrine or ephedrine, are used to manufacture the drug. Other chemicals used to make meth include acetone, paint thinner, ammonia, sulfuric acid (drain cleaner), lye, and battery acid.

Manufacturing meth is a simple but dangerous and toxic process. Meth “cooks” typically make the drug in small labs set up in homes, hotels, vacant buildings, automobiles, and abandoned properties. Because meth can be easily and inexpensively made, it can essentially be produced just about anywhere.

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Around 2009, the shake-and-bake method for meth manufacturing was introduced. In this process, meth is produced by combining raw, unstable chemical ingredients in a two-liter soda bottle and shaking the mixture until it chemically converts to meth. If the cook makes an error during the process, including removing the bottle cap too soon, the mixture could explode.

Meth Lab Risks

Meth labs present the greatest risk to occupants, neighbors, and first responders. Fire and explosion is the greatest and most immediate risk due to the chemicals involved in the cooking process. Exposure to the chemicals used to produce the drug pose a variety of health risks including shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, liver and kidney damage, neurological problems, and an increased risk of cancer. People who occupy former meth labs that have not been adequately decontaminated are exposed to the same risks.

The High Cost of Getting High

Approximately 12.6 million Americans, or 4.7 percent of the population, have used meth, and it's a significant contributor to crime in America. ¹ According to the [RAND Corporation](#), meth abuse costs the U.S. \$16.2 billion to \$48.3 billion annually.

How does meth affect the affordable and public housing industry? After analyzing reports from the organizations we insured from 2005 through 2017, we found that the average property damage claim for public housing was \$30,034.87. The average claim for our affordable housing customers was \$21,780.68. The size of the claim depends on the number of units affected and whether the damage was caused by meth cooks or by tenants using the drug. Losses were typically greater when fire is a factor.

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How to Identify a Meth Lab

Several clues can help you uncover a meth lab on your property. Pay attention to any increase in activity among residents or tenants and their visitors, especially at night. Note whether renters offer to pay in cash or if residences have blacked out windows. The presence of excessive trash associated with the supplies and chemicals used for cooking meth, such as chemical bottles, glassware, hoses, and pressurized cylinders is also a strong indicator. Strong or unusual chemical odors offer an additional clue.

If You Suspect a Meth Lab

If you or anyone in your housing organization suspects a meth lab, do not enter the property or unit. Contact your local law enforcement agency immediately. The police department will have personnel who are specifically trained to handle these situations safely and efficiently.

Tips for Preventing Meth Labs

How can you reduce or eliminate the possibility of criminals using your property to cook meth?

- Regularly inspect all properties, including vacant buildings
- Train employees on how to recognize a potential meth lab
- Tell employees to notify their supervisor immediately if they suspect a clandestine lab
- Educate residents on the dangers of meth abuse as well as the hazards associated with meth labs and the exposure they present to other occupants

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Cleanup Guidelines

There are no uniform guidelines or regulations governing the cleanup of meth lab properties for reoccupation, though the EPA does offer voluntary guidelines, and states have them as well. The safest way to clean up a meth lab is to hire environmental engineers who are trained in hazardous waste removal and cleanup. These licensed contractors will typically remove lab waste and any bulk chemicals. They will probably also:

- Air out the unit to reduce contamination that has soaked into the walls or furnishings
- Clean all vents and ductwork
- Wipe down outlet surfaces, replace air filters, and flush out the plumbing system
- Remove and discard contaminated carpet, furniture, and fixtures
- Wash all surfaces within the unit using a strong detergent
- Prime, seal, and paint walls

Because building materials and furniture can absorb contaminants and emit fumes, cleanup personnel should wear gloves, respirators, long sleeves, and eye protection.

When the cleanup is complete, the unit must be tested for any remaining chemical contamination in accordance with any state regulations prior to the next tenant moving in. It's important to contact your state's health department to ensure compliance with these guidelines.

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