

## DANGERS OF EXPOSURE TO CHEMICALS USED IN METH LABS

### Dangers are caused by:

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) that are in the form of explosives, acids, bases, metals, and chemical salts.

### Exposure to VOCs may cause:

- Nose and throat irritation
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Confusion
- Breathing difficulties

Benzene is a VOC known to cause cancer.

### Acids and bases may cause:

- A burning sensation on skin and in mucous membranes
- Severe eye damage

### Metals and salts can cause:

- Respiratory irritation
- Decreased mental function
- Anemia
- Kidney damage
- Birth defects

Lead and mercury are very hazardous and are often found in methamphetamine waste.

### Testing for contamination:

Since there are so many ways to make methamphetamine, each situation may be different. Identifying which method was used may help identify hazards.

No clean-up levels currently exist for many chemicals associated with meth labs. A risk assessment may be necessary to evaluate the potential for exposure on a case-by-case basis.

Until proper, professional clean-up has occurred, no one should enter the area without appropriate personal protective equipment.

**Property should not be rented, purchased, or occupied unless cleanup has occurred.**

## Who is responsible for cleaning up property?

The property owner is ultimately responsible for clean-up. The owner may also be legally responsible if persons get sick after they re-enter a contaminated building. **Law enforcement will remove waste but cannot decontaminate a site.** Health authorities should be contacted and deem the property habitable before renting, selling or moving into a former production site.

## Why is there concern about cleaning up illegal labs?

Illegal production of methamphetamine leaves behind approximately 5-7 pounds of hazardous waste per one pound of methamphetamine produced. It is highly possible that contamination is left on surfaces and in walls, carpets, counters, sinks, drains, ventilation systems or in soil and water.

***Meth lab contaminants pose health threats to persons exposed to them.***

For more information, contact local health authorities or law enforcement personnel.

**Kentucky State Police:** 1-800-555-2222  
**Pennyrile Narcotics Task Force:** 1-800-624-4596  
**Operation UNITE:** 1-606-424-4382



Suspected disposal down a sanitary sewer or landfill is hazardous and should also be reported to local wastewater treatment plant operators and landfill operators.

### Sources:

Section 4: Local Response Language and Materials from Minnesota Ordinances; Potential Funding Source; Retailers' Notification Program. Regulating the Cleanup of Clandestine Drug Lab Sites in Municipalities: A Summary Report, Carolyn Braun, Planning Director, City of Anoka, April 2002.

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[www.co.weld.co.us/departments/health/environmental/health\\_methlab.html](http://www.co.weld.co.us/departments/health/environmental/health_methlab.html)

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For additional information on health issues in Kentucky, contact your local County Extension Office or visit the HEEL website at: [www.ca.uky.edu/HEEL](http://www.ca.uky.edu/HEEL)

*Photos courtesy of: Pennyrile Narcotics Task Force.*

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