

DRAFT GUIDANCE NOTE: LOCAL GOVERNMENT POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO POLICE NOTIFICATION OF A CLANDESTINE DRUG LABORATORY (clan lab) DISCOVERY

The Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), Contaminated Sites Branch along with key stakeholders are developing practical guidance for local government environmental health officers (EHOs), with some provisional material hopefully for release by November 2010. This Draft Guidance Note has been prepared to provide some basic information on what action they may need to take when notified of a Clandestine Drug Laboratory (clan lab) in their local government area.

Notification of a clan lab is likely to be reported to an EHO by a member of the WA Police Service (WAPOL). (This situation is under review). Where an EHO may need more information of the chemical hazard, please contact the DOH Environmental Health Hazards Unit on 08 9388 4999.

After removal of illicit laboratory equipment and chemicals from a clan lab, residual amounts of some substances may persist on building surfaces and furnishings prior to decontamination depending on the process used. Residual substances could include: methamphetamine, other drug powders, chemicals used in manufacturing, iodine, and chemicals with low volatility.

If the police notify the EHO of a clan lab in their local government area, there are two distinct issues which need to be addressed. Both are relatively simple processes, and are as follows:

Issue 1: Potential contamination inside the dwelling (*Health Act 1911 and associated Regulations apply*).

The initial response by the EHO and any advice to the owner of the affected premises must be guided by preliminary advice on the type, quantity and location/extent of any chemical contamination provided by ChemCentre or other accredited laboratory. No one should access/enter affected premises until advice about the level of risk and any requirement for PPE&C has been obtained.

If possible, try and obtain the following information from police:

- The location of the site, whether the dwelling is still occupied and are there any immediate issues/hazards that require urgent attention
- Characterise what has occurred on the site, what happened and where? (i.e. where was the lab located inside the dwelling? (e.g. kitchen, laundry) or externally? (e.g. garage or garden shed);
- Was there any evidence of chemicals or wastes being dumped on or poured onto soil, potentially contaminating the site?; and

- If known, what type and quantity of chemicals were discovered. (ChemCentre, may be able to provide this information since they undertake drug forensic work at the site).
- Is there likely to be any immediate threat to the health of anyone accessing the premises and, if so, what precautions (e.g. respirator, gloves, other clothing) are required.

If a reaction has occurred inside a dwelling, you need to determine if the dwelling is fit for human habitation. A dwelling or part of a dwelling may be rendered unfit for human habitation due to drug residues being present inside the dwelling and in the vicinity of where the reaction occurred or wastes and chemicals were stored.

However discretion should be used, for example if the reaction occurred in the laundry, this may not prohibit use of the dwelling since a laundry presents a low level exposure and contained environment.

- Analytical testing will be required to determine if any drug residue remains in the dwelling. ChemCentre are able to provide advice regarding sampling and analysis of such residues.
- The analysis undertaken is for illicit drugs and associated chemicals, such as methylamphetamine. ChemCentre is the only laboratory in Western Australia that is currently accredited for forensic drug analysis.
- When making enquiries about obtaining testing services or when providing advice to an owner or agent, the ChemCentre should be contacted via email at clanlabremediation@chemcentre.wa.gov.au
- Once analysis is completed, ChemCentre will forward a report detailing their findings to the owner or whoever engaged their services, such as the local government. This report should be provided to the local government EHO showing illicit drug and associated chemical residues are present or not and other relevant data such as locations and degree of indoor contamination.
- If residues are not present, then the dwelling can be assumed to be fit for human habitation.
- If drug residues are present, then decontamination may be required. Decontamination should include cleaning of all surfaces within the dwelling, with the exception of ceilings, using warm water and detergent. Soft fabrics including curtains and carpet may need to be laundered, steam cleaned or disposed of if necessary. This service can normally be provided by most industrial cleaning service providers who can be located in the yellow pages.
- Once decontamination is complete, the owner or agent should be directed to repeat the analytical testing process to confirm that all residues have been removed.

Issue 2: Potential contamination outside the dwelling (*Environmental Protection Act 1986, Contaminated Sites Act 2003* and associated Regulations apply)

Chemicals and wastes from illicit drug manufacture are often dumped on the site or nearby, or stored in unsealed areas of the site. Evidence of wastes being dumped can include, but are not limited to, white/caustic residues and oil type staining on the soil, areas of disturbed earth/pits with evidence of wastes being deposited, areas of dead grass or vegetation, disused gas cylinders and discarded chemical containers or batteries.

- EHOs should contact DEC Pollution Response Unit (PRU) on 1300 784 782 for advice if dumping of wastes or chemicals into the environment is suspected.
- If there is any information that chemicals or wastes have been dumped on the site (i.e. into soil or water bodies), the EHO should submit a Form 1, report of a known or suspected contaminated site to the DEC, accompanied by any relevant photographs or inspection reports. This form is available from the DEC's website at <http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/2869/2062/>
- DEC/PRU will liaise with the EHO and determine if an environmental field notice is required, or determine another appropriate course of action. Clean-up may require specialised chemical or environmental services, depending on the nature and degree of contamination.
- For any site contamination inquiries, DEC Contaminated Sites Branch can be contacted at contaminated.sites@dec.wa.gov.au

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