

## CLANDESTINE METH LAB

**Methamphetamine** ... “meth”, “crank”, “speed”, “crystal”, “jib”, “ice”, “tina”, “glass”, “yaa baa”

Unfortunately, it is very difficult for a potential buyer to determine if a property has been used as a clandestine lab, and even if he is aware of it, he may not fully understand the health and monetary risks associated with it.

Meth is a synthetic material made from chemicals found in common household items and over-the-counter medicines. Cold and allergy medications are combined or “cooked” with common catalyst chemicals. These can include nail polish remover, hydrogen peroxide, iodine and battery acid. Of the dozens of chemicals that are commonly used in the production of meth, about one third are extremely toxic - as are some of the chemical by-products of manufacture.

Five to six kilos of toxic waste is generated from every kilo of meth that is produced. Vapours and spills can seep into wallboards, countertops, furniture, carpeting and insulation. Vapours get sucked into the heating or cooling system, and can spread throughout the home.

Many chemicals and by-products are disposed of on the land surrounding the lab or on neighbouring properties. Clean-up can involve removing tonnes of contaminated top soil, along with trees and other vegetation killed by chemicals and fumes. Drains and septic systems can also become contaminated, affecting a whole community drainage system.

Exposure or inhaling chemicals and fumes can cause health issues to your skin, the respiratory system, nervous system and internal organs. Common symptoms include eye and skin irritation as well as headache, dizziness, tightening of the chest, nausea and vomiting. In extreme cases, contamination can cause burns, liver and kidney damage, jaundice, and convulsions. Children are especially susceptible, as they spend more time on the floor or outdoors where chemicals might be found.

Costs to remove contaminated soil, dispose of left-over chemicals or tear down contaminated structures could exceed \$100,000. It is common for absentee homeowners, lenders or unsuspecting purchasers to find themselves with a toxic lab on their hands and are now facing massive remediation costs. Many cannot afford this expense and have little hope of selling it when it is “disclosed” that the property was used as a lab.

In BC, it is a legal requirement for anyone selling property to make a written disclosure if he knows that the property was previously used as a lab or grow-op. In many municipalities, a known drug house can be “shut down” until the owner secures a new “occupancy permit” - issued only after a thorough and expensive remediation.

Extensive tests can be used to detect existence of a clandestine lab, including ironically, the use of chemicals. Technical tests include pH indicators to test acids on surfaces and photo-ionization detectors to test chemicals in the air and ventilation systems. Only a trained professional can ensure that toxins have been completely eliminated.

Knowing the dangers and signs of a clandestine lab, by having a thorough property inspection, by monitoring non-resident owned property, and diligent inquiry, are all necessary to prevent you from becoming a victim of the meth lab nightmare.