

28 January 2016

Hina Short
Employment Relations Manager
Housing New Zealand Corporation

Paul Commons
Chief Operating Officer
Housing New Zealand Corporation

Re: Unidentified Methamphetamine Exposure in Housing New Zealand Tenancies

Dear Hina & Paul,

Currently Housing New Zealand tests for Methamphetamine contamination in our tenancies, when it is brought to the Corporations attention, by external agencies, tips by concerned neighbours or staff and contractor observations.

We understand that Housing New Zealand has proposed testing of all vacancies and currently is formulating a pilot programme for West Auckland vacancies?

Our concern is for staff, who currently enter tenancies that are contaminated, but as an organisation we are not yet aware of this contamination. The risk to staff is secondary contamination by unintentional exposure.

We submit in the interest of health and safety that all tenancies are tested as soon as possible to reduce the percentage and risk of exposure to secondary contamination to staff, contractors and other agency employees. We propose a time frame of 12 – 24 months.

Research on secondary contamination is minimal, however we believe prudence should be paramount when it comes to health and safety.

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On posing this scenario to ACC, they have suggested that HNZ issues a letter to all frontline staff confirming that contact with hazardous substances is likely. This letter would then provide the paper trail for any future claim with ACC.

We also wish to raise the following questions?

6. What is the current percentage of houses tested that have a positive result?
7. Which localities have a higher than average concentration of positive results?
8. What is the proposed timeframe for all tenancies to be tested?
9. What current or proposed research is HNZ undertaking in relation to secondary exposure to staff?
10. What risks have HNZ identified for staff around secondary exposure?

Our request for enhanced testing of tenancies is to give confidence to staff, who daily enter homes, that the risk of secondary contamination to "p" is substantially reduced. The issuing of individual letters is to reassure staff and increase the likelihood of receiving assistance from ACC should any later health effect arise.

We relate our concerns to the documented long-term effects of exposure to Asbestos based products and secondary smoking inhalation.

Current US research on secondary contamination of children who have lived in "p" contaminated houses has shown that the touching of surfaces can lead to absorption and ingestion to the body and can remain in body tissues several months after removal from contaminated properties.

The testing of apartments adjoining or adjacent to contaminated units have also shown contamination via vapour, through windows or interconnecting service ducts. The testing of neighbours' urine has in some subjects also shown positive results for "p".

The Texas Child Protection agency has issued a warning to foster parents re contaminated clothing from exposure to "p" houses that three washes will remove up to 98% of contamination, but in the process washing and drying machines will be contaminated.

Copy Brett Denham, PSA National Organiser

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10 February 2016

Ken Walker
Matthew Jamieson
Betty Swartz-Pannett
Sheree Peti
PSA National Delegates

Re: Secondary Contamination concerns

Dear PSA National Delegates,

Firstly I want to thank you for your letter received via email on 28 January. It is incredibly important for our people to feel their concerns are heard, and we appreciate that you have helped facilitate this by providing a collective view on behalf of them.

You will note that the CE provided an update on Friday 5 February, which outlines his and HNZ's commitment to keeping our people and our tenants safe in what is a very tough issue currently facing NZ.

The following excerpt from Glen's message in particular is relevant to the concerns you have raised, and conveys the serious and strong commitment HNZ has to our people's safety.

"We are developing an extensive policy and procedures for testing, decontamination and remediation. The draft versions have been sent out to Area Managers, Regional Portfolio Managers and some other key people in the business for feedback. We're aiming for it to be signed off and released in March.

Such is the importance that the executive and Board place on this issue that I have asked Andrew Booker to lead our response to this reporting directly to me. Andrew is being tasked with developing practical and effective solutions to deal with P safely and assertively.

The health and safety of our staff, tenants and contractors is our top priority and we're committed to providing a healthy environment for our tenants. We also need to protect our taxpayer-funded assets, which is why prevention and remediation is so important.

I want each of you to go home safe every day, and all of our tenants to be in healthy homes. That's what Health and Safety is about for me. Looking out for each other and being smart about risks is part of our culture at Housing New Zealand."

Recently, Health, Safety and Security Manager Tarniya Comrie commissioned a medical report on behalf of HNZ into the potential harm through exposure to Methamphetamine due to the work carried out by our people. The report was done by two Occupational Medical Physicians and provides some definitive findings. Attached is the report findings, and here are the links to the credentials of the Occupational Medical Physicians.

<http://www.healthpages.co.nz/medical-specialists/internal-medicine-related/occupational-medicine/courtenay-kenny>
<http://www.healthpoint.co.nz/private/specialist/dr-chris-walls/>

You will note that the report:

1. does not find that our people's exposure is likely to cause any harm, either in the short or long term, and
2. states HNZ should reassure staff that even if they can smell the chemicals they would not come to any harm while they vacate the premise.

Therefore, it would be inappropriate and incorrect for HNZ to issue letters to frontline staff confirming that contact with hazardous substances is likely.

You've raised a number of issues in regard to staff reporting incidents of exposure via HR Hub incident reporting, which we appreciate and will ensure are considered and/or factored into our current process. Health and safety are investigating a new system for recording any actual events that cause an adverse reaction or potential harm. Where any instances of this occurs our current reporting system, and the new one, have capacity to ensure the appropriate actions are taken to follow up on an individual basis. As you know ACC and the GP will also have an opinion in any situation where harm in the workplace occurs.

As this situation is fairly new in terms of an occupational workplace issue for all of NZ we are monitoring developments with our colleagues across MOH, Police and the wider Government agencies and will respond appropriately as we learn more.

You have raised further questions and at this stage we do not have definitive statistics as the processes are being developed for the collation and reporting via a programme of work that is currently underway. As this programme of work matures we will share our progress. I am sure though that you will find comfort in the information from the health professionals regarding your members health as we did for all of our employees and contractors. There will be opportunity to engage with us at the regular HNZ and PSA engagement meetings, and also the Health and Safety Representatives are kept up to date at committee meetings.

Thank you again for bringing these concerns and issues to our attention, we appreciate continuing to work constructively, and where possible, in partnership with the PSA in resolving issues and addressing concerns so that our staff feel safe and supported to be able to look out for each other and being informed and smart about risks.

Yours sincerely



Paul Commons
Chief Operating Officer
Housing New Zealand

09-March-2016

Hina Short
Employment Relations Manager
Housing New Zealand

Paul Commons
Chief Operating Officer
Housing New Zealand

Dear Hina and Paul,

We refer to your letter of the 10th February and wish to raise the following in response.

The Housing New Zealand commissioned medical report set the parameters of approximately 5-15 minutes of HNZN staff visiting tenancies. Both the medical experts reflect under the circumstances described Doctor Kenny, "occasional short term, transient exposure to homes in which P has been smoked": Doctor Walls "I would not consider such short exposures as likely to lead to any ill health effects".

We submit that some tenancies are visited more than once per year due to debt, anti social behaviour issues, annual inspections and the duration of the visits is variable. Not all contaminated tenancies are easily recognised as contaminated.

Length of visits can extend well over the 15 minutes depending on the nature of the visit. Final inspections are an example of longer visit duration. We also note our quality auditors can spend in excess of 15 minutes in some tenancies.

Our conclusions are based on Body guard statistics for a monthly term and our own experiences.

We also note with the on vent of use of tablets, inspections are taking longer than a paper based system. Experience from current users raises the concern of maintaining situational awareness, while working on tablets.

We request that Doctors Walls and Kenny give an updated opinion with regard to the wider parameters described above of duration and times staff visit properties more than once.

With regard to sensitivity to Methamphetamine, we refer to staff's personal reaction to some contaminated homes, as well as reaction of individual contractors to exposure. In our observation some staff and contractors are more sensitive to contaminated sites than others.

We are concerned to the number of HNZN houses that may be contaminated and may not been tested yet. There is a risk of secondary contamination by unintentional exposure.

In terms of the Health and Safety Act, we wish to ensure staff, contractors (and our clients) are protected through eliminating or minimising risks in the work place.

We therefore stress the need for all HNZN tenancies to be tested within a defined time frame.

We also recommend that Housing New Zealand takes the lead and with other government agencies to fund research regarding second hand contamination.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely

Sheree Peti
Matthew Jamieson
Betty Swartz Planet
Ken Walker

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