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Minister Responsible for HNZC

Overview of Housing New Zealand's approach to methamphetamine contamination

This paper provides you with information about:

- how Housing New Zealand addresses its methamphetamine contaminated properties
- the process by which its properties are tested and remediated
- the mitigation of health and safety risks for its tenants and staff
- the establishment of a national standard for the testing and remediation of methamphetamine contaminated properties.

National standard

New Zealand does not have a national standard for the testing and remediation of methamphetamine contaminated properties. The Ministry of Health's (MOH) "Guidelines for the remediation of clandestine methamphetamine laboratory sites (2010)" are used as a de facto standard across New Zealand. These guidelines are that contamination levels should be below 0.5 µg/100cm². Housing New Zealand uses these guidelines to determine if its properties are contaminated.

Housing New Zealand is taking part in the "Methamphetamine Testing and Remediation Standards Development Committee (P 8510)" administered by the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment (MBIE) in conjunction with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and other departments and industry experts. This committee was established in May 2016 to address a need for guidance on methodologies, procedures, and other supporting material that will ensure a consistent and effective approach to managing, testing, and remediation of contaminated properties. This committee will establish a new standard which will inform what level of contamination is considered safe in homes.

The MoH asked the institute of Environmental Science and Research to conduct a review of the threshold within the current guidelines. On 27 October 2016 the recommendations of this review were released and were endorsed by MoH for use as an interim guideline until the final standard is established in early 2017. The interim guidelines are:

- 0.5 µg/100cm² for houses where the drug has been manufactured (unchanged)
- 1.5 µg/100cm² for houses where the drug has only been used – where soft furnishings remain (for example, carpet)
- 2.0 µg/100cm² for houses where the drug has only been used – where soft furnishings have been removed.

In response to concerns raised around the difficulty in distinguishing between methamphetamine contamination due to use or manufacture, the Committee considered an alternative option: a single level of clean up for all sources of methamphetamine

contamination (including from manufacture) of 1.5 µg/100cm² and a separate level for limited exposure areas (such as roof and crawl spaces) of 3.8 µg/100cm². Both the three-level interim guideline and this alternative option were included in the public consultation document which was released on 12 December 2016. The public consultation period closes on 20 February 2017.

Housing New Zealand's methamphetamine testing process

Housing New Zealand is committed to minimising any potential health and safety risks to our tenants, staff, and contractors, and where we suspect one of our properties may be contaminated with methamphetamine, the property will always be tested as a matter of priority.

Housing New Zealand tests its properties to the levels recommended by the MoH, which are currently the interim guidelines released in October 2016. Housing New Zealand assumes properties are contaminated due to methamphetamine use, unless the property is proven to be used for manufacture (for example a lab was uncovered by Police, or evidence of manufacturing exists, such as equipment and chemicals).

Housing New Zealand follows a suspicion-based approach to testing homes, using intelligence from the New Zealand Police, information such as complaints from neighbours, and visual evidence gathered from tenancy managers during the tenancy inspection process or contractors undertaking work on the property. Physical signs of use can include smells, staining, ill health effects experienced while living at or visiting the property, and drug paraphernalia or the presence of equipment associated with making the drug.

If contamination is suspected, Housing New Zealand will carry out an initial test at the property, taking samples from surfaces inside the home and the shed or garage (if present). With permission, tenant belongings may also be tested as part of this process. The samples are sent to an independent lab to determine the level of methamphetamine residue present. Once the test results are received, and the contamination is above MoH guidelines, Housing New Zealand will look to decontaminate the property.

Housing New Zealand uses qualified and experienced contractors who are accredited (or in a process of being accredited) by International Accreditation New Zealand. Contractors have developed testing procedures based on a standard from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, US Department of Health and Human Services. This is the international standard used for sample taking and analysis and forms part of the MoH's guidelines.

Housing New Zealand has seen an increase in methamphetamine detection and this is a result of improved processes for identifying methamphetamine in properties, better information sharing with Police and other agencies, being more proactive toward testing, and up-skilling staff to help them better identify signs of methamphetamine use and manufacture.

Properties tested positive for methamphetamine contamination*

Financial year	Properties tested positive for methamphetamine
2013/14	28
2014/15	229
2015/16	802
2016/17**	593

*property tested above MoH guidelines at the time – updated interim guidelines came into effect in October 2016.

**as at 30 December 2016

When a property is confirmed as contaminated, Housing New Zealand will remediate the property. Remediation measures range from specialised cleaning through to stripping out and reinstating all or parts of the property. In extreme cases the property may require demolition.

Properties demolished due to methamphetamine contamination

Financial year	Properties demolished
2013/14	0
2014/15	7
2015/16	8
2016/17*	11

*as at 30 December 2016

The timeframe for the testing and remediating a property depends on the level of contamination. Generally, testing takes about two hours, time for receiving test results takes two to four weeks, and then decontamination can take up to three months. There are also cases where a property still has contamination levels above the MoH guidelines after decontamination, which means additional decontamination work will be completed until levels below the guidelines are achieved.

On average it costs a minimum of \$14,350 to test and decontaminate a property, which includes:

- initial test: \$2,750
- decontamination: \$10,000 - \$30,000
- re-testing after decontamination: \$1,600.

Below is the total annual cost to Housing New Zealand to test and remediate its properties:

Annual costs of testing and remediate

Financial year	Testing	Remediation	Total
2014/2015	\$0.8m	\$2.2m	\$2.97m
2015/2016	\$5.4m	\$15.7m	\$21.12m

Vacant properties due to methamphetamine contamination

At any given time, Housing New Zealand will have properties that are vacant due to methamphetamine contamination. The below table provides you with an overview of the number of vacant properties:

Vacant Housing New Zealand properties due to methamphetamine contamination

June 2013	June 2014	June 2015	June 2016	September 2016	December 2016
7	20	165	525	558	469

A full breakdown of the locations of these vacants by Territorial Local Authority and Auckland Local Board, as at 31 December 2016, is in Appendix A.

Ending tenancies

Housing New Zealand's first concern is the health and safety of its tenants and their household. If Housing New Zealand tests a property and the test shows contamination above MoH guidelines, it will issue a 90-day notice ending the tenancy so that the property can be cleaned. In some cases, Housing New Zealand may choose to issue a 7-day notice to end the tenancy as soon as possible if the contamination is significant.

Number of 90-day notices issued for methamphetamine contamination*

Financial year	Tenancies
2014/15**	7
2015/16	116
2016/17***	72

*does not include 7-day notices as this information is kept on individual tenancy files and are not centrally recorded

**Housing New Zealand began specifically recording 90-day notices issued for methamphetamine contamination in May 2015.

***to 30 December 2016

Housing New Zealand will make a decision whether or not to rehouse the tenant based on whether or not the tenant was responsible for the contamination. If it cannot be established that the tenant is responsible, they will be rehoused in another Housing New Zealand property.

If there is evidence that the tenant was responsible for the contamination, Housing New Zealand can decide to end their tenancy and suspend them for a year. Evidence that the tenant contaminated the property can include:

- the tenant admitting drug use in the property
- Housing New Zealand staff or contractors find drug paraphernalia at the property
- Police advise that the tenant has been convicted or has been charged with drug related offences
- other warning signs such as anti-social behaviour.

If Housing New Zealand is unsure whether or not a tenant used drugs in the property, or if there are any other considerations such as children living at the property, it may decide to rehouse the tenant on condition that the property is tested before the tenant moves in, and that the property be tested again at a later date.

Evictions are a last resort, and usually take place when a tenant refuses to engage with Housing New Zealand after a decision has been made to terminate their tenancy. An eviction occurs where a court bailiff is authorised to obtain possession of a property after a tenancy has been ended by the Tenancy Tribunal, the landlord has an order for possession of the property, and the tenant has not vacated it.

Below is the recorded number of tenants who were evicted for the main reason being methamphetamine use. Tenants can be evicted for more than one reason.

Housing New Zealand evictions due to methamphetamine contamination

Financial year	Evictions
2014/2015	2
2015/2016	5

Next steps

Housing New Zealand is awaiting the final methamphetamine contamination standards from MBIE, which are expected to be released in April 2017. This will determine the level to which properties are tested and decontaminated going forward.

Housing New Zealand is also continuing to improve systems to track and monitor contaminated properties, as well as to track tenants who may have caused contamination in the past. This will ensure consistent management of health and safety risks to staff and contractors who visit our properties.



Charlie Mitchell
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Housing New Zealand Corporation

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Appendix A:

Vacant Housing New Zealand properties due to methamphetamine contamination – Territorial Local Authority – 31 December 2016

Territorial Local Authority	Properties
Ashburton District	-
Auckland	194
Buller District	-
Central Hawke's Bay District	1
Central Otago District	-
Christchurch City	30
Clutha District	-
Dunedin City	1
Far North District	5
Gisborne District	11
Gore District	-
Grey District	-
Hamilton City	29
Hastings District	8
Hauraki District	-
Horowhenua District	3
Hurunui District	-
Invercargill City	1
Kaikoura District	-
Kaipara District	-
Kapiti Coast District	1
Kawerau District	1
Lower Hutt City	19
Mackenzie District	-
Manawatu District	-
Marlborough District	2
Masterton District	-
Matamata-Piako District	1
Napier City	31
Nelson City	-
New Plymouth District	3
Opotiki District	-
Otorohanga District	2
Palmerston North City	22
Porirua City	16
Queenstown-Lakes District	-
Rangitikei District	-
Rotorua District	16

Territorial Local Authority	Properties
Ruapehu District	3
Selwyn District	-
South Taranaki District	-
South Waikato District	1
Southland District	-
Stratford District	-
Tasman District	-
Taupo District	1
Tauranga City	22
Thames-Coromandel District	-
Timaru District	4
Upper Hutt City	2
Waikato District	4
Waimakariri District	1
Waimate District	-
Waipa District	4
Wairoa District	-
Waitaki District	-
Waitomo District	1
Wanganui District	3
Wellington City	10
Western Bay of Plenty District	1
Westland District	-
Whakatane District	1
Whangarei District	14
Total	469

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Vacant Housing New Zealand properties due to methamphetamine contamination – Auckland local boards – 31 December 2016

Community Board	Properties
Albert-Eden	8
Devonport-Takapuna	2
Franklin	1
Henderson-Massey	19
Hibiscus and Bays	-
Howick	6
Kaipatiki	8
Mangere-Otahuhu	34
Manurewa	20
Maungakiekie-Tamaki	12
Orakei	3
Otara-Papatoetoe	15
Papakura	10
Puketapapa	15
Rodney	-
Upper Harbour	-
Waiheke	-
Waitakere Ranges	4
Waitemata	30
Whau	7
Total	194

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