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Minister Responsible for HNZC
Associate Minister for Social Housing

Housing New Zealand's remediation of methamphetamine contaminated properties

You have asked for information relating to the process for remediation of methamphetamine contaminated Housing New Zealand properties, and how it addresses contamination issues with its tenants.

Overview of methamphetamine testing process

Housing New Zealand tests its properties to the levels recommended by the Ministry of Health's (MoH) guidelines. Housing New Zealand uses a suspicion-based approach to testing homes. If contamination is suspected, or there is reason to suspect that the incoming tenant previously contaminated a property, Housing New Zealand will carry out a test at the property, taking samples from surfaces inside the home and the shed or garage (if present). 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 may also test any tenanted or vacant property for other business-related reasons, for example a property sale, acquisition, or the expiry of a lease under the Home Lease Programme.

The MoH guidelines specify different levels of contamination for properties that are contaminated due to use or manufacture of methamphetamine. The guidelines stipulate that contamination is assumed to be due to use, unless the property is proven to be a meth lab through evidence. This can include advice from Police, or the presence of drug manufacturing equipment and chemicals.

Property decontamination

When a property is confirmed to have methamphetamine contamination above the MoH guidelines, Housing New Zealand will arrange for a decontamination specialist contractor to attend the property. Housing New Zealand's contractors used for this purpose include Building Remediation Services Limited, Anpure, Contaminated Site Solutions, Tech Clean, and Fresh Living. All contractors are qualified and experienced in providing decontamination services and have been supplying services to Housing New Zealand for a year or longer. Decontamination methods include the following:

- Triple wash – cleansing all surfaces in the home
- Stripping out the property – this can involve removing plasterboard, carpeting, curtains, and other features that may be contaminated
- Demolition

All contaminated materials stripped out and any external contaminated property is removed safely from the site as hazardous waste in accordance with Local Authority Regulations. If required, Housing New Zealand will arrange for decontamination of outside areas.

After the decontamination process is completed, Housing New Zealand will re-test the property to ensure that the decontamination was successful and that the property is safe to tenant. If the property re-tests positive for contamination, contractors will return to the property for additional decontamination work until the property is safe. If after repeated decontamination attempts there are still areas of the property that are contaminated, Housing New Zealand may consider demolishing the property.

Re-housing tenants

Housing New Zealand's first priority is the health and safety of its tenants. Once a property is confirmed to be contaminated, Housing New Zealand will meet with the tenants to discuss the test results, what will happen next, and to answer any questions. It is explained to tenants that their current tenancy will be ended by a 7 or 90-day notice, which is determined by factors such as the severity and extent of the contamination.

If the tenant is not responsible for contaminating the property, they will be advised that Housing New Zealand will help them move into another suitable property as soon as possible in an area where they want to live. Tenants will be supported by the Tenancy Liaison team, and Housing New Zealand will pay for reasonable moving costs. Housing New Zealand will also offer a discretionary grant to assist tenants with the cost of replacing their belongings that may have been contaminated. Housing New Zealand will stay in regular contact with the tenant throughout this process to address any issues that may arise.

The tenant will not be charged rent from the date a test confirms the property is contaminated, until the tenant is placed in another Housing New Zealand property. Tenants in this situation can be provided with a brochure that provides additional information and a list of frequently asked questions. If Housing New Zealand is unable to locate another suitable home within the notice period, it will see if the tenant is able to stay with family for a short time, or the Ministry for Social Development (MSD) may be able to assist them.

Housing New Zealand generally does not move the tenant back into their old property once it is decontaminated. Instead it allows the tenant to settle into their new home without the disruption of being required to move again.

Tenants who contaminated the property

If the tenant is responsible for contaminating the property, they will generally not be offered another property. Housing New Zealand will meet with the tenant and explain that their tenancy will be ended and that they will need to find alternative accommodation, and that they are being considered for suspension from living in a Housing New Zealand property for one year. The tenant is advised that they need to contact MSD to be assessed for social housing. Housing New Zealand will also contact Child Youth and Family if there are children living in the property, and may also provide the tenant with information about other community agencies that may be able to assist with drug addiction or other issues.

However, in some cases Housing New Zealand may decide to re-house a tenant who contaminated their property, or who is suspected to have contaminated their property. This is decided on a case-by-case basis and other factors will be taken into consideration such as the presence of children, or the tenant engaging with support services. It may also house only some individuals who lived in the tenancy. For example, Housing New Zealand may house elderly tenants whose property was contaminated by their adult children. The tenant's adult children would not be re-housed.

Housing New Zealand will intensively manage these tenancies by undertaking a baseline test for contamination to establish that the property to be tenanted is below the MoH guidelines. A Household Action Plan will also be created for on-going monitoring and testing throughout the tenancy for any change in levels of contamination from the baseline level.

Working with tenants

Information provided to tenants

At the beginning of their tenancy with Housing New Zealand, new tenants sign a Tenancy Agreement. Part of this agreement states that illegal behaviour in the property is not allowed and their tenancy can be ended as a result. Housing New Zealand will soon be introducing changes to pre-placement interviews for some new tenants where drug issues will be discussed more directly.

Housing New Zealand tenants have also been provided with information about methamphetamine through its Close To Home tenant newsletter, and through dedicated fact sheets.

Helping to sustain tenancies

If Housing New Zealand suspects a tenant may be committing illegal activity in their property, including using or selling drugs (for example a neighbour advises the tenant is selling drugs at the property, or advice from Police), it will always invite the tenant to a meeting to discuss the allegation. This provides an opportunity for the tenant to address any issues and for Housing New Zealand to explain what the consequences are for any breaches of their tenancy agreement. This process is part of Housing New Zealand's standard approach to managing any anti-social behaviour.

In addition, as part of the Sustaining Tenancies Trial, Housing New Zealand and MSD will work with other service providers to assist with some tenancies at risk of ending (including tenants with mental health issues, severe antisocial behaviour, or recidivist debtors). This includes tenancies that are potentially affected by illicit drug use. This trial is taking place in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch and will be running for the next two years.

Tenancing decontaminated properties

When tenancing a property that was previously decontaminated, the potential tenants will be advised of this. If they decline the property on this basis, MSD will be notified of the decline and will make a determination as to whether or not the decline is reasonable, as per its normal process.



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Housing New Zealand Corporation

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