Q&As on development of NZS 8510 *Testing and decontamination of methamphetamine-contaminated properties* – public comment

Q. *What is the purpose of the standard?*

A. The standard aims to address a need for guidance on methodologies, procedures, and other supporting material that will ensure a consistent and effective approach to managing the testing and decontamination of affected properties and treatment of their contents including:

- guidance on testing properties and contents for contamination
- methods of assessing risks to health, safety, and the environment from meth-related chemicals and contaminated material
- best practice procedures for decontamination and remediation of properties and contents to acceptable levels
- methods of disposal of materials that cannot be decontaminated
- information that supports auditing processes, which provide assurance that testing, risk assessment, decontamination and remediation of properties, and disposal of contaminated materials have been effective, and comply with legislative requirements.

Q. *Who developed the standard?*

A. Following its usual procedure consistent with the Standards and Accreditation Act 2015 provisions, Standards New Zealand invited a wide range of organisations to nominate representatives for appointment to the committee. A development committee was formed from various sectors including local government; central government; property management; accreditation; insurance; laboratory and testing companies; and remediation companies. The committee was approved by the Standards Approval Board under the Standards and Accreditation Act 2015.

Q. *Why is the standard necessary?*

A. Methamphetamine, or crystal methamphetamine hydrochloride (pharmaceutically referred to as methylamphetamine or desoxyephedrine), is a powerful and highly addictive synthetic drug. Methamphetamine is synthesised or 'cooked' in makeshift laboratories, using precursor substances such as ephedrine or pseudoephedrine as key ingredients. Both acute (short-term) and chronic (long-term) health effects can arise from the manufacture of methamphetamine. Acute exposure effects may come about through direct contact with the product or waste and inhalation of the product or waste. Burns, tissue irritation and rashes can be the consequence of chemical spills and skin contact. Other health effects such as nausea, dizziness and headaches can result from the inhalation of vapours and gases.[1] The surrounding environment is contaminated by the toxic chemicals and can cause health problems for people who, for example, buy a house that has been used to cook methamphetamine or has had methamphetamine users living in it, or tenants who move into a property that is contaminated.

1 Ministry of Health. 2010. Guidelines for the Remediation of Clandestine Methamphetamine Laboratory Sites. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

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The problem has been growing for some years in New Zealand and elsewhere. Correspondingly, there is a growing number of companies being established that offer property testing and decontamination services. There is currently no consistent approach to testing and decontamination and there is an absence of quality control measures. There is also debate on safe levels of contamination that enable properties to be reoccupied. The standard will address these issues.

Q. *The draft standard is out for public comment. What does this mean?*

A. This is a prescribed stage of the standards development process to ensure there is an opportunity for wide public consultation on the draft standard. All draft standards are posted on the Standards New Zealand website for at least 2 months and anyone can submit comment. At the end of the public comment stage, the standards development committee reviews all comments before finalising the standard for ballot amongst the committee. If you would like to make comment, go to the **Standards New Zealand website**.

The final standard has to be approved by the Standards Approval Board, which has to ensure that due process has been followed. The Board has to have regard to specific considerations in the Standards and Accreditation Act 2015 when approving a standard – including for example that the standard has been developed using a consensus process and whether due weight was given to submissions received from the public consultation process.

Q. *What does the standard say about clean-up levels for contaminated properties?*

A. The draft contains two options for clean-up levels and the committee seeks public comment on each of them.

Option A proposes 3 levels of decontamination that methamphetamine-contaminated properties should be cleaned to depending on whether the property was used for manufacturing methamphetamine (clandestine lab), or whether the property was used for methamphetamine use only and, in this case, whether carpets are removed. This option is based on adopting, unmodified, the 3 levels of decontamination recommended by an ESR report that was commissioned by the Ministry of Health.

Option B presents an alternative approach of applying one level of clean-up, irrespective of the source of methamphetamine contamination. The level proposed has international precedence for clandestine labs and is referred to in the ESR review as being the level applied in California, one of two states that have developed health risk-based methamphetamine surface concentrations for clean-up and re-occupation of clandestine labs. This option reduces uncertainty when deciding which levels to apply to a property contaminated with methamphetamine. Included in this option is a separate clean-up level for 'limited exposure areas', such as uninhabited roof spaces and crawl spaces, where potential exposure to any methamphetamine contamination is low, due to limited access, and where access is likely to be limited to adults. They are also spaces that are difficult to decontaminate.

There is more information in the **draft standard**.

Q. *What happens after the public comment stage is finished?*

A. The development committee goes through all the individual submissions before it finalises the draft standard. Then the draft goes to ballot which means the committee votes on it. The aim is to achieve 100% committee support for the final standard, but if this is not possible, then at least 80% of committee votes must be in favour of the final standard to achieve consensus required for the draft to be approved and published. This consensus policy is consistent with that of international standards bodies such as ISO (International Organization for Standardization).

Q. *What happens if there is less than 80% consensus?*

A. This is rare and the committee developing the standard is committed to producing a standard that can be published. If necessary, a mediator can be brought in to help resolve any outstanding issues.

Q. *Once the standard is published, who will use it?*

A. The most likely users of the standard will be:

- methamphetamine testing and clean-up/decontamination companies
- laboratories that analyse samples taken from methamphetamine-contaminated properties
- health, safety, and environmental regulators
- property owners, managers, and insurers.

Q. *Will it be mandatory?*

A. At this stage the standard will be voluntary. Standards only become mandatory if they are cited in legislation.

Q. *Why would organisations or individuals use the standard?*

A. Those who use the standard will be following best practice procedures that have been developed by experts in their fields.

Q. *Will the standard be free?*

A. Standards New Zealand receives no direct government funding so we need to recover the costs of developing and publishing our standards. There will be a charge for the standard.

Read more on the draft standard.