



P is for Prevention



It used to be just a simple letter in the alphabet but in recent years Methamphetamine (commonly known as P) has risen in notoriety and become associated with a lot more than that. Also known as speed, crystal meth, ice, pure, rock just to mention a few, the nickname 'P' is unique to New Zealand. Causing untold damage to people and property, it is important to recognise and protect both.

New Zealand Police have exposed more than 450 P-Labs over the past three years, including 137 last year, and experts say buyers and landlords need to be aware of the toxic dangers that living in a house exposed to this insidious practice presents. Methcon, a drug education group, receives a couple of calls a week from people who have unwittingly moved into a former P-Lab. More often than not they start noticing insomnia, a general feeling of lethargy, stinging eyes, sore throats and headaches.

Tenanted properties provide an easy access base and therefore make up the majority of P-Labs in New Zealand. Innocent property owners are often unaware of any manufacture, damage or illegal activity until well after the tenants have moved on. If a P-Lab is discovered, the clean-up is time consuming and expensive with the property often uninhabitable for some time and costing anywhere between \$5,000 and \$35,000. Combine this with loss of rental income and the long term impact on future rentals, the end tally can be extremely costly. The clean-up may involve removal of items including benches and sinks, baths, stoves, wallpaper and linings, carpet and drapes and even soil and septic tanks. Usually contamination damage is identified during Police investigations but a regular thorough landlord property inspection can lessen the risk and subsequent damage from methamphetamine manufacture.

When it comes to insurance some insurers now have specific clauses relating to the regularity of property inspection and these must be adhered to, to help validate any claims. If in doubt, ask the question with your insurer to make sure you know what is required.

If you suspect a dwelling or property is being used as a P-Lab contact the Police. They would call in the ESR (Environmental Science & Research) response team of forensic scientists who remove chemicals and conduct tests. If, as a tenant, you think you are living in a property that has been used as a P-Lab you should obtain as much information as possible to support your concerns and approach your Property Manager, Landlord or the Police. If, as a landlord, you are looking for that extra support surrounding this issue, consider using

a Professionals Property Manager to regularly inspect your property working with you to help minimise the risk.

There are a number of signs a property may be being used as a P-Lab. Both landlords and tenants should check for these signs before renting a property.

- * Unusual chemical smells that are not normally present in the area.
- * Numerous chemical containers (labelled solvent, acid, flammable) stored or stock piled.
- * Stained glass equipment and cookware.
- * Plastic or glass containers fitted with glass or rubber tubing.
- * Numerous cold tablet packages lying around or in the rubbish.
- * Portable gas tanks or other cylinders not normally seen or used in the area.
- * Chemical stains around the household kitchen sink, laundry, toilet or stormwater drains.
- * Yellow/brown staining of interior floor, wall, ceiling and appliance surfaces.
- * Reports from neighbours of unusual activity particularly at night
- * Windows covered/sealed day and night.

If a property is discovered to be operating as a P-Lab the council has several procedures in place including the order to make a Cleansing Order under Section 41 of the Health Act 1956. There are a number of P-Lab cleaning companies but no standard to meet before a house is deemed safe. Councils may also note former labs on their LIM (Land Information Memorandum) reports but there is no legal requirement to do so.

Police are grateful to hear from locals reporting suspicious activity or behaviour. With your help, they can reduce victimisation and the serious levels of harm illicit drugs cause to our community and properties alike.

