



CIRSA HAZARD ALERT

Published by the CIRSA Loss Control Department

SAFER TOGETHER

Hazard Alert - Methamphetamine Contamination in Public Spaces



You may have seen recent media coverage about methamphetamine (meth) contamination being discovered in municipal libraries and community centers in Colorado. Are there signs of illegal drug use at your facility? Is it meth? Can it hurt me? This Hazard Alert is intended to provide some general information about meth contamination, as well as useful resource links for your entity to learn more about this important topic.

Meth is a powerful amphetamine that produces a euphoric feeling when used. The illicit use of meth has become a serious public health and safety issue. Data from 2020 estimates that about 1.5 million people in the United States suffer from methamphetamine use disorder. In Colorado from 2013 to 2017 overdose deaths from methamphetamine have more than doubled¹ and treatment admissions in 2017 for individuals addicted to methamphetamine increased for the sixth year in a row².

Meth can contaminate surfaces in rooms where it has been used. Contamination can be assessed by collecting surface wipe samples from porous and nonporous surfaces from an impacted space. These samples are then submitted to a laboratory for testing. If lab results exceed state regulatory limits a Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) approved decontamination plan must be developed before clean-up can proceed. In Colorado these activities are regulated. Environmental sampling to determine contamination must be completed by a state certified consultant and decontamination of impacted spaces must be completed by a state certified contractor.

Even though exposure to meth is possible for municipal workers, in most situations, exposure will be limited. Current State cleanup levels are set to protect infants and children living in a space where meth is being produced. In other words, frequent long-term exposure. In a municipal setting exposure should typically be infrequent and of short duration. Colorado cleanup levels are not differentiated so as to provide separate thresholds for contamination of public places from smoking versus production. This creates a situation where the regulatory levels may be too restrictive for potential exposures in public spaces. Because of this, the regulatory community is considering establishing a different cleanup level for public spaces. Exposure, while not probable, is not impossible and one way to minimize any potential exposure is frequent hand washing.

CIRSA HAZARD ALERT

Methamphetamine Contamination in Public Spaces (cont.)

Symptoms of meth exposure may include the following³:

- Watery, red, and burning eyes, often accompanied by discharge and pain
- Irritation of the mucus membranes, especially in the nose and throat
- Skin irritations, redness, and rashes
- Chest pain and difficulty breathing
- Abdominal pain and diarrhea
- Chronic sneezing, coughing, and congestion
- Adverse effects on the central nervous system
- Moderate or severe headaches
- Dark-colored urine
- Rapid heart rate
- Yellow jaundice
- Fever
- Impairment in mental capabilities
- Hallucinations

If you experience any of these symptoms after exposure to suspected or known illicit drug use, please seek medical assistance. If you observe or suspect meth was used in any municipal public space, contact your immediate supervisor who then should contact their supervisor, law enforcement, and the local municipal or county public health agency. In many locations the local public health agency will not respond unless referred to by law enforcement.

Once a public space is officially decontaminated it is safe for re-occupancy but there is no guarantee that it will remain clean. Due to the ability to easily purchase meth and its widespread and increasing use, recontamination may occur. There are several strategies to reduce the likelihood of repeated test, clean and re-test, and re-clean cycles. One option is for patrons wishing to use the restroom to ask staff for a pass or have staff unlock the door. Another option is for a monitor or security person stationed at bathroom entrances to request a pass from any patron wishing to use the bathroom. The pass could be an electronic device or a numeric passcode. Another is frequent, routine checks of restrooms by security staff or other personnel.

Emerging technology offers promise to prevent contamination. Several products are hitting the market. One device, produced by a New Zealand company, claims to be the first to offer real time meth air monitoring. The manufacturer of the P Alert Meth Alarm⁴ claims their device can detect air borne methamphetamine from production or smoking. The device, which is the size of a TV remote, samples the air every thirty minutes and transmits time, location and concentration to a facilities manager, mobile phone or, at certain concentrations, to law enforcement.

Research to develop a real time colorimetric test for meth using mobile phones is also ongoing⁵. This technology, if fully developed, will allow surfaces to be tested in real time using mobile phone technology. This process uses the Simon presumptive color test in combination with the built-in digital camera on a mobile phone to detect methamphetamine. Simon's reagent is a simple spot-test to identify methamphetamine by a color change to blue. The mobile phone's camera can then interpret the intensity of this color and assign a concentration value.

Developing a programmatic approach to illicit drug use in public facilities is an excellent proactive step in managing the problem of meth use in public facilities. Development of a policy and specific procedures including contingency planning is an appropriate risk management mitigation step. Concerns from the public and employees can be addressed proactively by having specific processes, including appropriate technologies and security procedures in place. Control of costs from these unplanned events can also be minimized by taking these proactive steps.

CIRSA HAZARD ALERT

Methamphetamine Contamination in Public Spaces (cont.)

References:

1. Rumbach, Peter J., ,
[Colorado State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup, Methamphetamine Topical Brief Series: Vol. 1, August 1, 2019](#)
2. Colorado Substance Abuse Trend and Response Task Force, Thirteenth Annual Report published January 2019.
3. Webpage, Boulder County Dept of Public Health, Methamphetamine (Meth),
<https://bouldercounty.gov/environment/healthy-home/methamphetamine/>
4. Canlas, Krizzel, Insurance Business NZ, '[World-first' meth detection alarm developed](#), January 19, 2019
5. Coolum A, Parabun K, Klawach N, Daeid NN, Kanatharana P, Wongniramaikul W. Real time quantitative colourimetric test for methamphetamine detection using digital and mobile phone technology. Forensic Sci Int. 2014 Feb; 235:8-13. doi: 10.1016/j.forsciint.2013.11.018. Epub 2013 Dec 16. PMID: 24447445.

Additional Resources:

[Cleanup of Methamphetamine – Affected Property, 6 CCR 1014-3](#)

[CDPHE Methamphetamine-Affected Properties Environmental Cleanup Webpage](#)

[CDPHE Meth Affected Property PowerPoint](#)

[CDPHE Methlab Training and Certification Lists](#)

[Boulder County Dept. of Public Health Meth Webpage](#)

[P Alert Meth Alarm](#)