

New meth decontamination levels revealed

Thursday 29 June 2017 The Landlord by Miriam Bell

It's been a long time coming but the much anticipated new meth testing and decontamination standard is finally here – and it's good news for landlords.

Standards New Zealand released the new testing and decontamination meth standard, which covers properties used as meth labs as well as properties where meth has been used, today.

The most significant change in the new standard is that a new contamination level of 1.5 micrograms per 100cm² limit has been set.

Under the old guidelines, the limit was 0.5g micrograms per 100cm².

While the draft standard released in December last year proposed a three level approach to contamination limits, the new standard sticks to a single level approach.

But it establishes clear methods for sampling and testing and competency requirements for samplers and decontamination contractors.

This is considered critical given ongoing reports of inconsistent tests and excessive decontamination costs.

The standard will also require accreditation for people carrying out testing for detailed assessments and recognised training courses for testing and decontamination operators.

Fuelled by regular horror stories about meth contaminated properties, public concern about meth contaminated properties continues to run high.

But Standards New Zealand manager Carmen Mak said the new standard will address concern on the safety of occupants in houses where meth has been detected, as well as providing a benchmark to those in the industry.

“Application of the standard will provide assurance that activities such as screening, sampling, testing, assessing, and decontamination of contaminated properties, and disposal of their contents, are carried out in accordance with good practice.”

The new standard is a huge step forward and will allow New Zealanders to better manage the risks of meth in residential properties, Building and Construction Minister Nick Smith said.

“It will give people greater confidence and certainty, will result in hundreds fewer properties having to be vacated and save millions in unnecessary decontamination work.”

Smith added that the new standard is also an important part of the *Residential Tenancies Amendment Bill (No 2)*, which is currently making its way through Parliament.

The bill, which is intended to allow better management of meth contaminated properties, would give landlords the right to test for meth and enable tenancy agreements to be terminated when levels are unsafe.

NZ Property Investors Federation executive officer Andrew King said it is great that meth contamination limits have been increased to more realistic levels in the new standard.

He hopes the new levels will help to calm the fear surrounding the spectre of meth contaminated properties, but said that there is still a widespread lack of understanding of the whole issue.

“For many people, including Tenancy Tribunal adjudicators, any level of contamination is toxic. That is not the case. The new 1.5 level is conservative – and it is safe. There are likely to be higher levels on bank notes.”

“But the government should run a public education campaign on the new standard so that people learn how the levels are established and what they mean.”

King, who was a member of the meth standard committee, said the fact that testing accreditation will be required should address concerns about inconsistent tests and cowboy operators.

“The new standard means everyone will know what they have to do and how to do it. It provides greater clarity, more consistency and more reassurance to what has been a confused area.”

In a statement, the Real Estate Institute of New Zealand (REINZ) said that the lack of a national standard has led to scaremongering and mis-information for members of the public around testing and decontamination processes.

“The new standard will give property owners, landlords and property managers more confidence around test results which will help protect the health and safety of occupants.

“It is a big step in the right direction towards gaining certainty around whether a property is contaminated and, if so, how it should be decontaminated.”