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Betta Inspect It Bulletin 19 – Are you confused about meth testing?

Welcome to the 19th edition of Betta Inspect It's building inspectors' bulletin.

What is the deal with this Meth stuff?

There's certainly been plenty of TV and other media coverage on meth contamination issues and the testing industry lately but not all of it informative. If this has left you bewildered and puzzled you're certainly not alone. Everyone who calls us about methamphetamine testing has also been very confused.

We, Betta Inspect It, have been trying our best to keep everyone - confused clients, referrers, corporate partners and friends alike – fully in the picture. As part of this here are our insights into the various tests and procedures involved. These should allow you to make an informed decision on this vexing issue.

Meth testing

There are several ways to physically test for meth residue or contamination. The main two ways of sampling are, DIY self-testing and laboratory-based scientific testing.

Self-Testing (strip testing)

These are the DIY test kits that you can buy online or off the shelf and use yourself. You take a swab of say part of wall, mix it with some dilution, add a chemical reactant and wait for the result. It's not rocket science.

This type of testing is quick, easy to use and cheap.

However, there are definite drawbacks to this type of testing. The results are:

- Not as accurate.
- Can give false readings.
- Are very dependent on the tester and the location, i.e. where you've chosen to test.

The Real Estate Agents Authority (REAA) has recently issued this cautionary statement “Given the potential challenges and reliability issues presented by strip testing, there is a strong argument for not supporting the use of these strip tests. You should discuss the pros and cons of allowing these tests to be done with the vendor.”

Source - REAA June 2016 newsletter: <http://ow.ly/P4ER30294ls>

Betta Inspect It agrees with the REAA and other members of the real estate industry that the more reliable method of lab based testing (detailed below) should be used instead of the self test kits.



Lab-based testing (This is the type of testing Betta Inspect It uses!)

Our inspectors use test kits supplied by an independent laboratory. These contain swabs so we can test different rooms and spots, referred to as “locations” around the house. They're then placed in a test tube and sent to the IANZ accredited lab for analysing. Once we've received the results are passed on directly to the client concerned.

This type of testing is highly accurate and very sensitive. It doesn't rely as much on variables such as who took the samples and where because of the level of sensitivity of the lab testing that is used.

However, this process does have a couple of drawbacks as well:

- The lab takes 2 or more days to analyse the results.
- The testing is more expensive (in some cases).



Understanding the results

The laboratory can analyse the samples in several different ways. The main two ways are as a “composite” and as “detailed/laboratory testing”. This is what’s causing the most public confusion.

Composite testing (also known as field composite)

A composite lab test is where multiple swabs are taken in arrange of different areas throughout a house. Normally 8 swabs are taken for a typical 3 bedroom house. (There are 8 swabs per lab test tube). These swabs are taken in locations that are likely to harbour meth, or areas that have not been masked (eg areas that have not been cleaned or re-painted recently). The theory behind this type of testing is that it provides you with a yes/no result as well as an accumulated result.

So, as we’ve said this type of testing is very sensitive. It’s ideal if you simply want to know if meth is present or not, but the number result (in ug) will not go into any great detail other than serving as a guide to the level of Meth in the house. This is because the result is an accumulation.

Here’s what an accumulated result could look like.

Report came back with:

IS METHAMPHETAMINE PRESENT? YES total amount present in samples taken of 0.14 µg

Now this make up of 0.14 µg could look like the below (just an example).

Area Tested	Result
Kitchen	0.02
Bathroom	0.04

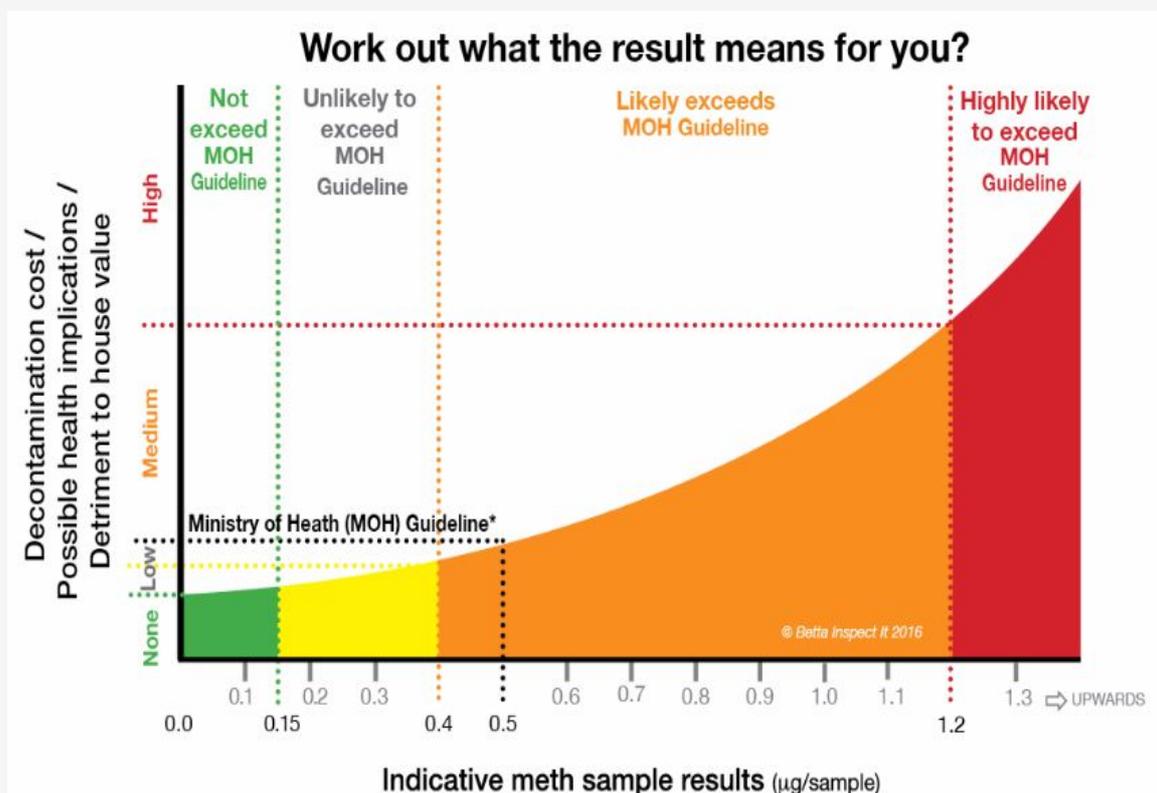
Bedroom two	0.05
Bedroom one	0.00
Bedroom three	0.01
Lounge	0.01
Hall	0.00
Laundry	0.01
TOTAL	<u>0.14</u>

If you do a Field Composite taken from 8 areas as above (6 areas with meth and 2 areas without), you would end up with a potential Meth result of 0.14ug/tube. This does not mean your house is a meth lab or there are health implications. It merely states there are signs of meth in the house. You cannot compare a composite result to the Ministry of Health guidelines. This is because it's an accumulated result, not individual room-by- room result.

Please refer to our explanatory graph

To explain this further you can take your Meth Sample (0.14 as above) result and find the corresponding number along the bottom of this graph. This shows the likely decontamination cost, possible health implications and detriment to house value associated with a reading of that level.

It also indicates whether further “room-by-room” testing to the NIOSH9111 Standard is recommended where results are “likely exceed” or “highly likely exceed” the New Zealand Ministry of Health Guideline levels for the remediation.



* The Ministry of Health currently recommends that surface wipes for methamphetamine not exceed a concentration of 0.5 µg/100cm as the acceptable post-remediation re-occupancy level for a dwelling that has been used as a clan meth lab.

As you will be able to see, if you place a line on 0.14 (composite result) the analysed samples would not exceed the MOH guidelines if further detailed room-by-room testing was undertaken.

You may ask, why don't we simply just test every room independently then I can see what the levels are?

There's a perfectly valid reason for this - the lab charges "per sample tube analysed." If you have 10 rooms, and we have to do 10 separate tubes (which is required to compare against the Ministry of Health guidelines) you would be up for more \$\$\$\$s (= more cost). And in some cases the result could still come back as negative. So it's best to do a composite test first. We charge \$159+GST for this. Then if it comes back positive (depending on the level) we can do further testing. (We charge \$1000+GST upwards based on house size). If the initial composite test comes back negative, we have provided you with a great value-for-money service.

Detailed Testing (This is the type of testing Beta Inspect It undertakes after composite testing)

Detailed testing (as referred to above) is where we go room-by-room through a property test each room individually using one lab tub and sample per room. There is a Standard for this called NIOSH9111 which outlines the sampling technique (i.e. how to take the swabs). This type of testing is expensive (because the laboratory charges per tube) and is normally only done once the initial composite test finds a positive result. Detailed testing results can then be compared against the Ministry of Health guidelines and decontamination companies can quote to remediate the properties from there.

Summary/direction forward

When clients want a meth test - whether it's for a new property purchase, a new tenancy, between tenancies or just for general piece of mind – we strongly recommend the following three steps.

- (1) Laboratory testing always
- (2) Carrying out an initial composite test first

If the results come back positive and may exceed the MOH guidelines if further tested, which you can check this against our graph, then we recommend,

- (3) Further detailed testing be carried out in accordance with NIOSH9111.

You can then compare the more detailed results with the New Zealand Ministry of Health Guidelines for the remediation of Clandestine Methamphetamine Laboratory Sites maximum safe levels of 0.5µg per 100cm² sampled.

We hope you find these additional insights help. You're also most welcome to pass on and share this newsletter with friends, colleagues and anyone else interested as one way of keeping everyone informed. A copy of this article will also be uploaded to our website and social media pages ...

If you have further questions or want to share your personal experiences please email your comments to info@bii.co.nz. We're happy to cover a range of feedback on this issue in our next enews edition.

We appreciate you spending the time to read this edition of our Betta Inspect It bulletin and thanks - in advance - for your continued support.

Best regards,

The Team at Betta Inspect It building inspectors.

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