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Any property, any suburb, any town: how ice contaminates thousands of properties

Tens of thousands of Australians are living and working in properties that may be contaminated by methamphetamine, commonly known as ice, affecting their health and wellbeing.

Mr Miles Stratford, from MethSolutions, will tell an international conference in Melbourne today that people are being harmed unnecessarily due to a failure in assessment and cleaning regulations.

'Any property, any suburb, any town is at risk of meth contamination,' said Mr Stratford. 'That's the reality of it. Contamination can arise from the use or manufacture of meth, and residues can be left behind. We've seen meth labs in the best suburbs through to the worst, in commercial properties, boats and vehicles – but rental properties are the biggest risk area.'

Mr. Stratford said that about 700 labs are being busted across Australia each year, with an estimated 8,000 labs identified in the past 20 years or so. These are just 5 to 10 per cent of those estimated to be in operation. 'When you consider that meth labs move around and then add use-related contamination to the mix, it's likely that hundreds of thousands of properties across Australia will have meth residues in them that exceed acceptable Federal Government guidelines.'

He said that health effects range from immune system degradation, rashes, breathing problems, and impacts on behaviour and sleeping, especially in children.

'Once meth residues are at manufacture levels, health effects start to get really, really nasty,' he said. 'It's not just meth residues but other chemicals in the mix such as sulfuric acid, hydrochloric acid, lead, mercury and a range of volatile organic solvents.'

Exposure to contaminated properties is an easily avoidable situation, exacerbated by variations in laws from state to state, said Mr Stratford. 'There are areas of grey within legislation, which means contaminated properties can be sold without being cleaned up, with risks not being disclosed at the time of sale. Not all Australian states have the same level of responsibility, and there's a disconnect between what the Federal Guidelines recommend and the actions at State and local authority level. These leave innocent people unwittingly exposed to significant risks to their physical, financial and emotional wellbeing.'

'The vast majority of people are ignorant of the ongoing risk presented to personal health and wellbeing from the historic use and manufacture of meth,' he said. 'The lack of awareness means people are not considering this risk when they buy or rent property.'

Mr Stratford set up the New Zealand-based company MethSolutions with his wife in 2012 to reduce the harm caused to people by meth-affected properties. He will present his paper, *The tip of the iceberg! What Australia's ongoing fascination with meth means for the assessment and clean-up industries* on Monday afternoon.

CleanUp 2017 – the 7th International Contaminated Site Remediation Conference – is organised by CRC CARE and is being held in Melbourne from 11 to 13 September. The conference program is available at www.cleanupconference.com/program.

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Tip of the iceberg: although this property appears clean, it is heavily contaminated, with the highest reading of meth residues around 3,000 times above guideline levels.