

Fact Sheet

Clandestine drug laboratories: Guidance for suitably qualified experts (clan lab assessors)

The unlawful manufacture of controlled drugs can pose a risk to public health. In South Australia, SA Police (SAPOL) notified clandestine drug laboratories (clan labs) must be assessed and managed in accordance with the South Australian Public Health (Clandestine Drug Laboratories) Policy 2016 (the Policy).

Regard shall be given to the 'Practice Guideline for the Management of Clandestine Drug Laboratories under the South Australian Public Health Act 2011' (the Practice Guideline), and the 'National Clandestine Drug Laboratory Remediation Guidelines' (the National Guidelines), in order to achieve a satisfactory assessment and remediation of SAPOL notified clan labs.

What is the purpose of this fact sheet?

- > To provide specific guidance on how suitably qualified experts must assess premises or vehicles following the SAPOL notification of a clan lab, and to highlight the expectations of SA Health which is responsible for implementation, oversight and review of the Policy.
- > To provide an overview of the legislated framework for preliminary assessment, remediation and validation phases during the assessment and remediation of SAPOL notified clan labs.
- > To highlight the involvement of state and local public health authorities during the process of SAPOL notified clan lab assessment and remediation.
- > This fact sheet should be used in conjunction with the National Guidelines, the Practice Guideline, and relevant contaminated land management guidelines, which may be applicable depending upon the nature and location of the contamination.

What determines a suitably qualified expert?

To ensure SAPOL notified clan lab assessments are conducted appropriately and in accordance with legislative requirements, they must be performed by a suitably qualified and independent expert (assessor) with experience in the fields of environmental engineering, environmental science, environmental health or occupational hygiene **and** who is in possession of tertiary qualifications in one of these disciplines from a recognised educational institution (a recognised university).

Assessments undertaken by persons not meeting these experience and qualification requirements are not acceptable for the management of SAPOL notified clan labs.

What involvement does SA Health have in clan lab investigations?

As part of the public health investigation of a clan lab, SA Health flags the property on the South Australian Integrated Land Information System ([SAILIS](#)) upon receipt of a clan lab notification from SAPOL. The aim of this is to:



- > complement the public health action taken by local authorities (including the use of section 7 flags).
- > ensure SA Health is notified in the event that a Property Interest Report for the property is requested from Land Services SA (e.g., if the owner intends to sell the property).

The flag on the property is removed by SA Health upon confirmation by the relevant local public health authority that the property has been successfully remediated.

What involvement do local council environmental health officers have in clan lab investigations?

Environmental health officers are authorised under the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011* and are responsible for:

- > issuing notices requiring preliminary assessment of notified clan labs.
- > where necessary, issuing additional notices requiring remediation and validation testing of clan labs in accordance with the Practice Guideline and the National Guidelines.
- > reviewing the preliminary site assessment report, remediation action plan and the validation report to ensure they align with the Practice Guideline and the National Guidelines. If the validation report is found to be unsatisfactory, further remediation will be required before notices and flags can be removed.

What information do I need to obtain before conducting a preliminary assessment?

All SAPOL notified clan labs are required to undergo a preliminary assessment by a suitably qualified expert to determine the level of risk, which informs any remediation required. Having access to the following information before commencing a preliminary assessment will assist an efficient and thorough assessment:

- > The address of the clandestine lab (and the locations and details of all parts of the premises that may be of particular importance in the assessment process).
- > Details of the type of premises (e.g., residential or commercial) and a plan of the property.
- > Occupancy information (including identifying rooms inhabited by children).
- > Copies of all notices served on the premise relating to the clan lab.
- > Identified potential hazards or threats – chemical, environmental, electrical, physical, biological, or human.
- > The description (if known) of synthesis method(s) suspected or believed to have been undertaken at the premises.
- > The name and contact details of the investigating local council environmental health officer.

What should I consider when designing the sampling program for the site assessment?

A sampling program aims to determine the presence and extent of any contamination. Both systematic sampling and professional judgement should be applied to the assessment of every notified clan lab.

Checking for surface contamination inside a building, vehicle, or structure

The below points guide and inform surface sampling (refer to the National Guidelines section 5.2.4 for more details).

- > Samples should be collected through wipe or swab within 100cm² areas of non-porous surfaces such as mirrors, bench tops, painted walls, and metal surfaces etc.
- > A minimum of five samples should be taken inside the building.
- > Blanks should be taken at regular intervals. The number of blanks should equate to approximately 10 per cent of the total sample number.
- > Areas that show evidence of contamination should be sampled.

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- > Surfaces used in the drug manufacturing process should be sampled. If those surfaces have been removed, an area as close as practicable to that area should be sampled.
- > Ventilation ducts (if present) closest to the area of drug manufacture should be sampled. In most circumstances a swab sample should be sufficient.
- > Any room or area inhabited by a child or children less than 16 years of age should be sampled at least once.
- > Samples should generally not be taken from areas behind furniture or appliances or from surfaces that appear to have been recently cleaned.

Please note: Colormetric testing (e.g., MethChek® Immunoassay Wipe Kits) shows presence or absence of methamphetamine at the test kit's sensitivity level. These kits can be used as a screening tool to guide areas to be sampled for more detailed analysis of multiple relevant contaminants by a suitable laboratory. Test results from colormetric test kits alone are not acceptable in site assessment or validation (post remediation) assessment.

Checking for volatile organic compounds (VOCs)

The below points guide and inform VOC sampling (refer to the National Guidelines section 5.2.5 for more details).

- > Each room where a chemical process was thought to have taken place should be sampled.
- > Each room where chemicals or equipment were thought to have been stored should be sampled.
- > Each room where there is evidence of spillage or staining should be sampled.
- > Any bedroom or playroom of a child under 16 years of age should be sampled.

Checking for wastewater contamination

Waste from the unlawful manufacture of controlled drugs is often poured into the wastewater system of the premises. The below points should guide the assessment process (refer to the National Guidelines section 5.2.6 for more details).

- > If waste from a clan lab premises flows into a septic tank, all chambers of the septic tank should be pumped out and the contents should be taken to a contaminated waste facility.
- > A minimum of one soil sample from the septic bed or disposal area should be collected and analysed.

Sampling soils, surface water and groundwater

If sampling soils, groundwater, and surface waters, the below points should guide and inform sampling (refer to the National Guidelines section 5.2.7 for more details).

- > Any soil that shows evidence of contamination shall be sampled.
- > Soil sampling should be systematic, with judgemental sampling applied to areas of suspected contamination.
- > At least one sample should be taken from the septic bed and tank (if present) on the property.
- > If there is no evidence of contamination, at least two soil samples should be taken from the property, close to well-travelled paths.
- > Depending on your professional opinion, groundwater should be sampled if sufficient risk to groundwater integrity exists based on site factors such as the presence of existing groundwater bores, drug waste disposal on site, or the presence of deep pits on the site.

Note: The assessor must notify the EPA if serious or material environmental harm is caused or threatened, or underground water is contaminated.

If results from the samples taken during the site assessment are higher than the acceptable investigation levels, a remediation action plan (RAP) should be developed by the suitably qualified expert and provided with the preliminary assessment.

Remediation action plans (RAPs)

The broad purpose of RAPs is to establish remediation goals to ensure that, once remediated, clan labs will be suitable for their proposed use and will not pose an unacceptable risk to public health. The RAP should document in detail all the procedures and plans that will be implemented to reduce risks to acceptable levels, as well as establish environmental safeguards to complete the remediation in an environmentally acceptable manner.

The preparation of a RAP for a clan lab must address the components as detailed in section 5.4 of the National Guidelines.

Site validation

Following remediation, further assessments are required (through a validation process) to ensure that the objectives of the RAP have been achieved. The details of the site validation are compiled and presented in a validation (post remediation) report. This report should include the specifics as set out in section 6.1 of National Guidelines which includes (but is not limited to):

- > a general inspection of the site to check for re-staining or odours.
- > re-sampling of surfaces from which initial above investigation level samples were previously taken.
- > sampling of areas which are expected to have frequent contact, e.g. kitchens and bathrooms.
- > a combination of swab sampling and sampling for VOCs where required.

All post remediation sampling results are required to be below the investigation levels set out in Appendix 1 of the National Guidelines.

If sampling results identify exceedance of any of the prescribed investigation levels, this must be set out in the report. Further remediation and validation sampling will be required.

For more information

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