

Statement from the Salish & Kootenai Housing Authority

Contamination from methamphetamine use in managed housing continues to be an acute issue across Indian Country, but there has been little scientific research done to understand and evaluate the health risks associated with exposure to such contamination. The Salish and Kootenai Housing Authority (SKHA) requested Training & Technical Assistance (T&TA) from HUD Office of Native American Programs (ONAP) to conduct research to evaluate the scientific basis for the spectrum of current standards for safe or acceptable levels of use-related methamphetamine contamination in managed housing in part to facilitate their own development and adoption of new meth standards and practices, but also to create a technical resource to assist other Tribally Designated Housing Entities across Indian Country. The *Use-Related Methamphetamine Contamination in Managed Housing: Current Knowledge and Standards and Future Policy Directions* report is a product of the T&TA request to HUD ONAP that was requested by the SKHA, coordinated by National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC) and conducted by Big Water Consulting and Seven Sisters Community Development Group.

SKHA began testing and remediating its managed units in 2014, using the limited research and guidance available to create policy and remediation standards with the intention of keeping residents and staff safe. Since then, the SKHA has learned that these standards are not specific to use-related contamination and were created to address the hazards of methamphetamine manufacturing, where toxic chemicals and contaminants are released during the cooking process. The SKHA used a risk assessment process to weigh the harms caused by applying these remediation standards meant for lab environments to contamination caused only by meth use. In addition to the unknown health risks associated with contamination, the following harms resulting from the SKHA's precautionary remediation approach were considered:

- Tenant evictions (creating homelessness),
- Ineligibility for the SKHA programs due to having an accounts receivable balance (potentially creating housing instability and need for emergency resources),
- Extended unit turnover rate (increasing risk of vandalism—there was recently a house fire in a vacant meth unit),
- Extended waiting list due to units out of service while awaiting remediation (contributing to homelessness and housing instability—applicants could wait for 2+ years),
- Financial burden on the SKHA (drained financial reserve—spent over \$5million since 2014),
- Lost housing development opportunities due to remediation costs consuming the limited funding (the SKHA has passed over opportunities for new unit construction because the budget could not sustain the cost of maintaining new units).

After all the risk factors were considered, the SKHA Board of Commissioners approved a revised policy. The revised policy utilizes the existing meth remediation standards only for contamination caused by meth labs to match the intended scope of the EPA and other toxicology research used to create these standards. Therefore, the SKHA will no longer test for meth after a tenant moves out unless law enforcement officials identify a meth lab at the property. Please review the full report for a more in-depth review of the science and standards regarding use-related methamphetamine contamination and the risk assessment process by which the SKHA arrived at this revised policy.

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