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# I-Team exposes toxic residue in former meth houses

By ABC7

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The I-Team went to homes that were busted for methamphetamine production. We tested to see if the drug was still there, even though laws have been in place since 2006 that demand cleanup. We found some serious holes in the system.

Margarita Gutierrez and her kids like a late afternoon snack on the floor, but the food may not be all they're ingesting.

Noyes: This house comes up as a former meth lab.

Gutierrez: Really?

Noyes: Does that surprise you?

Gutierrez: Hell, yeah!

Busted in 2006, the cops came in and took the bad guys away. The state took away the chemicals, but something might be left behind, somethir

Gutierrez: "I've b

The I-Team tested Gutierrez's rental house. We took samples from the stove, windows in two different rooms, and from the heating vent looking for meth.

"There's a host of effects, everything from the central nervous system through the breathing system to the heart," says Dr. Taymor Shah Durani, a medical toxicology fellow with the San Francisco Poison Control Center. "So, just about every organ system can be affected."

Durani says touching, ingesting or breathing the residue from meth makers can be dangerous, especially to kids.

"Sometimes they breathe faster than adults do just normally," he says. "So they may be getting a higher dose for their size than an adult may be getting from some of these chemicals."

"They're my, kids they're my everything, and I'd do everything for them to protect them and make sure that they're healthy," says Gutierrez.

She may have to take steps to protect them after seeing our test results.

"I didn't think it was possible, but I guess it is now," she says.

Our initial sample came back positive for meth, but it was under the limit for what the state considers to be safe. But we did a second test, this time just of the heating vent. The result? More than double the state limit, leaving Gutierrez and her family living with meth.

"What did they do after they found out it was a meth lab? Did they just leave it and let it sit?" she asks.

The I-Team took the results to Contra Costa County Chief Environmental Health and Hazardous Materials Programs Officer Randy Sawyer. His department oversees the cleanup of meth residue in homes.

"We don't have information on this house as being a drug lab," says Sawyer. "So we have no information except what you're bring to me right

With no informa

"One of the things is that there are other law agencies that do drug busts that do not give us the information when they're doing it at all times -- the Bureau of Narcotics along with the Department of Justice," explains Sawyer.

Sawyer gave us documents on the 10 meth homes that were reported in the last five years. According to a state database there were almost 30 homes busted for meth over that same time period.

"Many times we're not communicated when they do bust a lab in our county," he says.

Bureau of Narcotics special agent in charge Stephen Ladeck was at the drug bust at Gutierrez's house. He described it as "More or less a typical methamphetamine laboratory."

"I don't know whether we notified them or not," says Ladeck, who tells the I-Team there was no requirement to do so in 2006 when the lab was busted, but a recent law has closed that loophole.

"There's a provision in the health and safety code now that mandates notification of a meth lab by the Department of Justice or local agency," he says.

But even with the new law, Sawyer doesn't think his county knows about every meth bust and the documents the I-Team has uncovered seem to back that up.

"I'm not sure exactly how to fix it," says Sawyer. "I know what we've done in the past, we've sent out letters to different law agencies to inform us when there is a drug lab -- they find a drug lab and to let us know this."

And that adds even more frustration for Gutierrez. She doesn't have the money to move and she's worried about the possible effects of meth residue her children have already suffered.

"My house is contaminated now," says Gutierrez. "I mean it's everything I've worked for, you know. It's my kids' home and it's all just shattered in one day."

The one bright spot  
how many homes

here is no telling  
lists dating back

to 1995 in a [new I-Team Blog here](#).

We'll be back with part two of this story Wednesday on ABC7 News at 6 with a look at the amount of meth the state says is safe to have in your home.

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