



Saint Paul – Ramsey County Department of Public Health Environmental Health Section

Procedure: Employee Safety in Responding to Public Health Nuisance Complaints

Date:
Revised August 2011

Reference: Ramsey County Public Health Nuisance Ordinance, Ordinance No. 2006-371
Minnesota Statutes Section 145A.04

Definition: Public Health Nuisance shall have the meaning given to it by Minnesota Statutes section 145A.02, subd. 17 and shall include, but not be limited to, any condition which poses an immediate and direct hazard to human health if left unremedied due to the existence of the condition itself or due to the immediate threat of transmission of disease through insects, animals, or other means of transmission or infections. A Clandestine Drug Lab is a Public Health Nuisance.

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to provide standard operating procedures for Environmental Health Section staff working in the field to respond to Public Health Nuisance Complaints in order to assure the health and safety of the staff and other responders.

Acronyms: CEH: Community Environmental Health Program
EH = Environmental Health
EHS = Environmental Health Specialist
SPRCDPH = Saint Paul – Ramsey County Department of Public Health

Approach: Employee health and safety is a priority.

This Procedure recognizes that public health nuisances are varied and complex, and that different approaches are required for different circumstances. These procedures provide guidance to assure consistency, but recognize that flexibility in approach is sometimes warranted.

This Procedure also recognizes that a “team” approach is needed in most public health nuisance situations. A variety of agencies may be involved, and the Department will work with others to assure that agencies coordinate their responses in a safe manner.

Procedures:

1. This procedure assumes that steps preliminary to a field investigation have been completed, such as validating the complaint, recording the complaint and notifying the CEH supervisor.

2. As a preliminary step to field investigation, the Environmental Health Specialist shall question witnesses over the telephone about the conditions of the property related to the complaint, in order to determine if there are any interventions/actions necessary to protect the health and safety of the occupants and/or the EHS who will be entering the home to perform the investigation. The inquiry should gather the following information:
 - Unusual activity
 - The presence of children, vulnerable adults, or animals
 - Occupant mental health issues,
 - Past history with the property
 - Specific safety concerns with the property, including but not limited to:
 - Hazardous chemicals/Meth lab
 - Explosives
 - Firearms/weapons
 - Visible mold on walls/ceilings
 - Animal feces/urine
 - Insect or rodent infestations
 - Strong odors (ammonia, mold, sulfur/rotten eggs)
 - Structural issues
 - Inaccessible areas of the home
3. The CEH Supervisor shall be consulted if there are unusual circumstances or if there are any unusual health and safety concerns. The Supervisor shall then assist the EHS with the appropriate response.
4. Any field investigation of a public health nuisance shall involve two staff people, unless otherwise approved by the CEH Supervisor. An EH staff person may investigate alone without Supervisor approval, if accompanied by another agency staff person, such as a local fire marshal or other local inspector. If appropriate, the site visit shall be conducted with law enforcement personnel present.
5. Prior to leaving the office the EHS shall sign out using the Section's sign-out procedures, so that the EHS location in the field can be identified. If the EHS is in the field, the EHS shall call the receptionist and notify the receptionist of the EHS's location.
6. EH staff responding to a PH Nuisance Complaint should have safety clothing and equipment with them. All of this equipment shall be provided by the Department. Prior to leaving the office the EHS should verify that they have this equipment, and that it is in working order. This shall include:
 - Steel-toed safety boots
 - Knee-high rubber boots
 - Cloth coverall
 - Safety glasses
 - Safety goggles
 - Leather work gloves
 - Non-latex plastic gloves
 - Dust mask
 - Hard hat
 - Hand sanitizers
 - Flashlight

- Digital camera
 - Garbage bags to discard soiled items
7. The EHS should confirm that the cell phone assigned to them is in working order before leaving for the site. The EHS shall carry the cell phone with them at all times during the investigation, and should make sure that it is turned on.
 8. When arriving at the site, the EHS should drive by/around the site to conduct a windshield assessment of the situation.
 9. The EHS should park the car to provide an escape route.
 10. Upon leaving the car, the EHS should lock the car
 11. The EHS should have an authoritative demeanor, be compassionate, and walk purposefully and with confidence. The EHS should always remember that he/she is a representative of the Department.
 12. When, on the site, if the EHS senses danger, leave IMMEDIATELY and call 911.
 13. When entering the premises:
 - Be alert and observant
 - Be aware of the occupants actions
 - Pause at the door, listen
 - Ask the occupant if there are other people or animals present
 - If there are known safety concerns, ask law enforcement to conduct a sweep of the property
 - Make mental note of other exits when you enter dwelling
 - If you feel outnumbered, leave the building
 - Ask that nuisance pets be put in another room
 - Do not enter a dark room first
 - Never lead, always follow, especially when going up or down stairs
 - Sit with your back to a wall
 - Always keep an escape route in mind
 - The two EHS staff should keep the occupant between them or in front of them at all times.
 14. Employees may remove themselves from a situation in which the employee considers him/herself to be “at risk” without fear of reprisal or negative performance implications. When the employee removes himself/herself from such a situation, the incident must be reported to the CEH Supervisor.
 15. If an employee encounters hazards that create an imminent risk of injury, such as explosives or an extreme fire hazard, gas leaks or similar situations, the employee should leave immediately and call 911.
 16. Employees should use caution when making observations, not putting themselves into hazardous situations. Employees should be aware of the location of other people and/or animals on the premises.

17. Depending on the type of complaint, and the type of hazard present, the EHS should use the safety clothing and equipment appropriately.
18. Upon first entering the premises, the EHS should make a preliminary assessment of hazards, and then assure that they wear appropriate safety clothing and equipment. The Section will work with Department and County Occupational Health staff to maintain a list of potential hazards and ways to mitigate the risks associated with them.
19. If the EHS identifies a hazard that cannot be assessed, or that clearly poses a substantial risk, the EHS should leave the premises and notify the EHS Supervisor. If the hazard is a communicable disease, the Supervisor should seek advice related to assessing the hazard and identifying the risk by the following steps
 - Contact the Department’s Employee Health Coordinator, Amy Jacobson, 651-266-1209.
 - If she is not available contact, the County Occupational Health and Safety Manager, 651-266-2929.
 - If that person is not available, contact one of the Department Epidemiologists at 266-1277.
 - Department staff must follow the safety advice provided by one of these individuals in this situation.
 - Should outside agencies seek information about the hazard; the Department will identify a point of contact for those agencies to get that information. All inquiries should be directed to and answered by that contact person.
20. If the EHS identifies hazards that are unknown, the EHS shall make best efforts to describe the risk, so that Department resources can quantify the risk and propose safety measures to deal with the risk.

Signed:

Environmental Health Director

Date

Department Employee Health Coordinator

Date