

Chapter 64.44 RCW
CONTAMINATED PROPERTIES

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RCW 64.44.005 Legislative finding. The legislature finds that some properties are being contaminated by hazardous chemicals used in unsafe or illegal ways in the manufacture of illegal drugs or by hazardous drugs contaminating transient accommodations regulated by the department. Innocent members of the public may be harmed by the residue left by these chemicals when the properties are subsequently rented or sold without having been decontaminated. [2017 c 115 § 1; 1990 c 213 § 1.]

RCW 64.44.010 Definitions. The words and phrases defined in this section shall have the following meanings when used in this chapter unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

(1) "Authorized contractor" means a person who decontaminates, demolishes, or disposes of contaminated property as required by this chapter who is certified by the department as provided for in RCW 64.44.060.

(2) "Contaminated" or "contamination" means polluted by hazardous chemicals so that the property is unfit for human habitation or use due to immediate or long-term hazards. Property that at one time was contaminated but has been satisfactorily decontaminated according to procedures established by the state board of health is not "contaminated."

(3) "Department" means the department of health.

(4) "Hazardous chemicals" means:

(a) Methamphetamine in amounts exceeding the decontamination standards set by the department when found in transient accommodations such as hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, resorts, inns, crisis shelters, hostels, and retreats that are regulated by the department; and

(b) The following substances associated with the illegal manufacture of controlled substances: (i) Hazardous substances as defined in RCW 70A.305.020; (ii) precursor substances as defined in RCW 69.43.010 which the state board of health, in consultation with the pharmacy quality assurance commission, has determined present an immediate or long-term health hazard to humans; and (iii) the controlled substance or substances being manufactured, as defined in RCW 69.50.101.

(5) "Officer" means a local health officer authorized under chapters 70.05, 70.08, and 70.46 RCW.

(6) "Property" means any real or personal property, or segregable part thereof, that is involved in or affected by the unauthorized manufacture, distribution, storage, or use of hazardous chemicals. This includes but is not limited to single-family residences, units of multiplexes, condominiums, apartment buildings, transient accommodations, boats, motor vehicles, trailers, manufactured housing, any shop, booth, garden, or storage shed, and all contents of the items referenced in this subsection. [2021 c 65 § 62; 2017 c 115 § 2; 2013 c 19 § 49; 2006 c 339 § 201; 1999 c 292 § 2; 1990 c 213 § 2.]

Explanatory statement—2021 c 65: See note following RCW 53.54.030.

Intent—Part headings not law—2006 c 339: See notes following RCW 74.34.020.

Finding—Intent—1999 c 292: "The legislature finds that the contamination of properties used for illegal drug manufacturing poses a threat to public health. The toxic chemicals left behind by the illegal drug manufacturing must be cleaned up to prevent harm to subsequent occupants of the properties. It is the intent of the legislature that properties are decontaminated in a manner that is efficient, prompt, and that makes them safe to reoccupy." [1999 c 292 § 1.]

Effective date—1990 c 213 §§ 2, 12: "Sections 2 and 12 of this act are necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety or support of the state government and its public institutions, and shall take effect on the effective date of the 1989-91 supplemental omnibus appropriations act (SSB 6407) [April 23, 1990] if specific funding for this act is provided therein." [1990 c 213 § 17.]

RCW 64.44.020 Reporting—Warning—Notice—Duties of local health officer. Whenever a law enforcement agency becomes aware that property has been contaminated by hazardous chemicals, that agency shall report the contamination to the local health officer. The local health officer shall cause a posting of a written warning on the premises within one working day of notification of the contamination and shall inspect the property within fourteen days after receiving the notice of contamination. The warning posting for any property that includes a hotel or motel holding a current license under RCW 70.62.220, shall be limited to inside the room or on the door of the contaminated room and no written warning posting shall be posted in the lobby of the facility. The warning shall inform the potential

occupants that hazardous chemicals may exist on, or have been removed from, the premises and that entry is unsafe. If a property owner believes that a tenant has contaminated property that was being leased or rented, and the property is vacated or abandoned, then the property owner shall contact the local health officer about the possible contamination. Local health officers or boards may charge property owners reasonable fees for inspections of suspected contaminated property requested by property owners.

A local health officer may enter, inspect, and survey at reasonable times any properties for which there are reasonable grounds to believe that the property has become contaminated. If the property is contaminated, the local health officer shall post a written notice declaring that the officer intends to issue an order prohibiting use of the property as long as the property is contaminated.

If access to the property is denied, a local health officer in consultation with law enforcement may seek a warrant for the purpose of conducting administrative inspections. A superior, district, or municipal court within the jurisdiction of the property may, based upon probable cause that the property is contaminated, issue warrants for the purpose of conducting administrative inspections.

Local health officers must report all cases of contaminated property to the state department of health. The department may make the list of contaminated properties available to health associations, landlord and realtor organizations, prosecutors, and other interested groups. The department shall promptly update the list of contaminated properties to remove those which have been decontaminated according to provisions of this chapter.

The local health officer may determine when the services of an authorized contractor are necessary. [2006 c 339 § 202; 1999 c 292 § 3; 1990 c 213 § 3.]

Intent—Part headings not law—2006 c 339: See notes following RCW 74.34.020.

Finding—Intent—1999 c 292: See note following RCW 64.44.010.

RCW 64.44.030 Order declaring property unfit and prohibiting use—Notice—Hearing—Emergency order. (1) If after the inspection of the property, the local health officer finds that it is contaminated, then the local health officer shall issue an order declaring the property unfit and prohibiting its use. The local health officer shall cause the order to be served either personally or by certified mail, with return receipt requested, upon all occupants and persons having any interest therein as shown upon the records of the auditor's office of the county in which such property is located. The local health officer shall also cause the order to be posted in a conspicuous place on the property. If the whereabouts of such persons is unknown and the same cannot be ascertained by the local health officer in the exercise of reasonable diligence, and the health officer makes an affidavit to that effect, then the serving of the order upon such persons may be made either by personal service or by mailing a copy of the order by certified mail, postage prepaid, return receipt requested, to each person at the address appearing on the last equalized tax assessment roll of the county where the property is located or at the address known to the county assessor, and the order shall be posted

conspicuously at the residence. A copy of the order shall also be mailed, addressed to each person or party having a recorded right, title, estate, lien, or interest in the property. The order shall contain a notice that a hearing before the local health board or officer shall be held upon the request of a person required to be notified of the order under this section. The request for a hearing must be made within ten days of serving the order. The hearing shall then be held within not less than twenty days nor more than thirty days after the serving of the order. The officer shall prohibit use as long as the property is found to be contaminated. A copy of the order shall also be filed with the auditor of the county in which the property is located, where the order pertains to real property, and such filing of the complaint or order shall have the same force and effect as other lis pendens notices provided by law. In any hearing concerning whether property is fit for use, the property owner has the burden of showing that the property is decontaminated or fit for use. The owner or any person having an interest in the property may file an appeal on any order issued by the local health board or officer within thirty days from the date of service of the order with the appeals commission established pursuant to RCW 35.80.030. All proceedings before the appeals commission, including any subsequent appeals to superior court, shall be governed by the procedures established in chapter 35.80 RCW.

(2) If the local health officer determines immediate action is necessary to protect public health, safety, or the environment, the officer may issue or cause to be issued an emergency order, and any person to whom such an order is directed shall comply immediately. Emergency orders issued pursuant to this section shall expire no later than seventy-two hours after issuance and shall not impair the health officer from seeking an order under subsection (1) of this section. [2006 c 339 § 203; 1999 c 292 § 4; 1990 c 213 § 4.]

Intent—Part headings not law—2006 c 339: See notes following RCW 74.34.020.

Finding—Intent—1999 c 292: See note following RCW 64.44.010.

RCW 64.44.040 Orders declaring property unfit and prohibiting use—City, county action—Entrance upon property prohibited. (1) Upon issuance of an order declaring property unfit and prohibiting its use, the city or county in which the contaminated property is located may take action to prohibit use, occupancy, or removal of such property; condemn, decontaminate, or demolish the property; or require that the property be vacated or the contents removed from the property. The city or county may use an authorized contractor if property is demolished, decontaminated, or removed under this section. The city, county, or contractor shall comply with all orders of the health officer during these processes. No city or county may condemn, decontaminate, or demolish property pursuant to this section until all procedures granting the right of notice and the opportunity to appeal in RCW 64.44.030 have been exhausted, but may prohibit use, occupancy, or removal of contaminated property pending appeal of the order.

(2) (a) It is unlawful for any person to enter upon any property, or to remove any property, that has been found unfit for use by a local health officer pursuant to RCW 64.44.030.

(b) This subsection does not apply to: (i) Health officials, law enforcement officials, or other government agents performing their official duties; (ii) authorized contractors or owners performing decontamination pursuant to authorization by the local health officer; and (iii) any person acting with permission of a local health officer, or of a superior court or hearing examiner following an appeal of a decision of the local health officer.

(c) Any person who violates this subsection is guilty of a misdemeanor.

(3) No provision of this section may be construed to limit the ability of the local health officer to permit occupants or owners of the property at issue to remove uncontaminated personal property from the premises. [2006 c 339 § 204; 1999 c 292 § 5; 1990 c 213 § 5.]

Intent—Part headings not law—2006 c 339: See notes following RCW 74.34.020.

Finding—Intent—1999 c 292: See note following RCW 64.44.010.

RCW 64.44.050 Decontamination, demolition, or disposal by owner—Requirements and procedure—Costs—Decontamination timeline. (1) An owner of contaminated property who desires to have the property decontaminated, demolished, or disposed of shall use the services of an authorized contractor unless otherwise authorized by the local health officer. The contractor and property owner shall prepare and submit a written work plan for decontamination, demolition, or disposal to the local health officer. The local health officer may charge a reasonable fee for review of the work plan. If the work plan is approved and the decontamination, demolition, or disposal is completed and the property is retested according to the plan and properly documented, then the health officer shall allow reuse of the property. A release for reuse document shall be recorded in the real property records indicating the property has been decontaminated, demolished, or disposed of in accordance with rules of the state department of health. The property owner is responsible for: (a) The costs of any property testing which may be required to demonstrate the presence or absence of hazardous chemicals; and (b) the costs of the property's decontamination, demolition, and disposal expenses, as well as costs incurred by the local health officer resulting from the enforcement of this chapter.

(2) (a) In a case where the contaminated property is a motor vehicle as defined in RCW 46.04.320, a vehicle as defined in RCW 46.04.670, or a vessel as defined in RCW 88.02.310, and the local health officer has issued an order declaring the property unfit and prohibiting its use, the city or county in which the property is located shall take action to prohibit use, occupancy, or removal, and shall require demolition, disposal, or decontamination of the property. The city, county, or local law enforcement agency may impound the vehicle or vessel to enforce this chapter.

(b) The property owner shall have the property demolished, disposed of, or decontaminated by an authorized contractor, or under a written work plan approved by the local health officer, within thirty days of receiving the order declaring the property unfit and prohibited from use. After all procedures granting the right of notice and the opportunity to appeal in RCW 64.44.030 have been exhausted, if

the property owner has not demolished, disposed of, or decontaminated the property using an authorized contractor, or under a written work plan approved by the local health officer within thirty days, then the local health officer or the local law enforcement agency may demolish, dispose of, or decontaminate the property. The property owner is responsible for the costs of the property's demolition, disposal, or decontamination, as well as all costs incurred by the local health officer or the local law enforcement agency resulting from the enforcement of this chapter, except as otherwise provided under this subsection.

(c) The legal owner of a motor vehicle as defined in RCW 46.04.320, a vehicle as defined in RCW 46.04.670, or a vessel as defined in RCW 88.02.310 whose sole basis of ownership is a bona fide security interest is responsible for costs under this subsection if the legal owner had knowledge of or consented to any act or omission that caused contamination of the vehicle or vessel.

(d) If the vehicle or vessel has been stolen and the property owner neither had knowledge of nor consented to any act or omission that contributed to the theft and subsequent contamination of the vehicle or vessel, the owner is not responsible for costs under this subsection. However, if the registered owner is insured, the registered owner shall, within fifteen calendar days of receiving an order declaring the property unfit and prohibiting its use, submit a claim to his or her insurer for reimbursement of costs of the property's demolition, disposal, or decontamination, as well as all costs incurred by the local health officer or the local law enforcement agency resulting from the enforcement of this chapter, and shall provide proof of claim to the local health officer or the local law enforcement agency.

(e) If the property owner has not acted to demolish, dispose of, or decontaminate as set forth in this subsection regardless of responsibility for costs, and the local health officer or local law enforcement agency has taken responsibility for demolition, disposal, or decontamination, including all associated costs, then all rights, title, and interest in the property shall be deemed forfeited to the local health jurisdiction or the local law enforcement agency.

(f) This subsection may not be construed to limit the authority of a city, county, local law enforcement agency, or local health officer to take action under this chapter to require the owner of the real property upon which the contaminated vehicle or vessel is located to comply with the requirements of this chapter, including provisions for the right of notice and opportunity to appeal as provided in RCW 64.44.030.

(3) Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, the local health officer has thirty days from the issuance of an order declaring a property unfit and prohibiting its use to establish a reasonable timeline for decontamination. The department of health shall establish the factors to be considered by the local health officer in establishing the appropriate amount of time.

The local health officer shall notify the property owner of the proposed time frame by United States mail to the last known address. Notice shall be postmarked no later than the thirtieth day from the issuance of the order. The property owner may request a modification of the time frame by submitting a letter identifying the circumstances which justify such an extension to the local health officer within thirty-five days of the date of the postmark on the notification

regardless of when received. [2011 c 171 § 106; 2008 c 201 § 1; 2006 c 339 § 205; 1999 c 292 § 6; 1990 c 213 § 6.]

Intent—Effective date—2011 c 171: See notes following RCW 4.24.210.

Intent—Part headings not law—2006 c 339: See notes following RCW 74.34.020.

Finding—Intent—1999 c 292: See note following RCW 64.44.010.

RCW 64.44.060 Certification of contractors, supervisors, or workers—Denial, suspension, revocation, or restrictions on certificate—Penalties—Fees. (1) A contractor, supervisor, or worker may not perform decontamination, demolition, or disposal work unless issued a certificate by the state department of health. The department shall establish performance standards for contractors, supervisors, and workers by rule in accordance with chapter 34.05 RCW, the administrative procedure act. The department shall train and test, or may approve courses to train and test, contractors, supervisors, and workers on the essential elements in assessing contaminated transient accommodations or property used as an illegal controlled substances manufacturing or storage site to determine hazard reduction measures needed, techniques for adequately reducing contaminants, use of personal protective equipment, methods for proper decontamination, demolition, removal, and disposal of contaminated property, and relevant federal and state regulations. Upon successful completion of the training, and after a background check, the contractor, supervisor, or worker shall be certified.

(2) The department may require the successful completion of annual refresher courses provided or approved by the department for the continued certification of the contractor or employee.

(3) The department shall provide for reciprocal certification of any individual trained to engage in decontamination, demolition, or disposal work in another state when the prior training is shown to be substantially similar to the training required by the department. The department may require such individuals to take an examination or refresher course before certification.

(4) The department may deny, suspend, revoke, or place restrictions on a certificate for failure to comply with the requirements of this chapter or any rule adopted pursuant to this chapter. A certificate may be denied, suspended, revoked, or have restrictions placed on it on any of the following grounds:

(a) Failing to perform decontamination, demolition, or disposal work under the supervision of trained personnel;

(b) Failing to perform decontamination, demolition, or disposal work using department of health certified decontamination personnel;

(c) Failing to file a work plan;

(d) Failing to perform work pursuant to the work plan;

(e) Failing to perform work that meets the requirements of the department and the requirements of the local health officers;

(f) Failing to properly dispose of contaminated property;

(g) Committing fraud or misrepresentation in: (i) Applying for or obtaining a certification, recertification, or reinstatement; (ii)

seeking approval of a work plan; and (iii) documenting completion of work to the department or local health officer;

(h) Failing the evaluation and inspection of decontamination projects pursuant to RCW 64.44.075; or

(i) If the person has been certified pursuant to RCW 74.20A.320 by the department of social and health services as a person who is not in compliance with a support order or a *residential or visitation order. If the person has continued to meet all other requirements for reinstatement during the suspension, reissuance of the license or certificate shall be automatic upon the department's receipt of a release issued by the department of social and health services stating that the person is in compliance with the order.

(5) A contractor, supervisor, or worker who violates any provision of this chapter may be assessed a fine not to exceed five hundred dollars for each violation.

(6) The department of health shall prescribe fees as provided for in RCW 43.70.250 for: The issuance and renewal of certificates, conducting background checks of applicants, the administration of examinations, and the review of training courses. [2017 c 115 § 3; 2013 c 251 § 6; 2006 c 339 § 206; 1999 c 292 § 7; 1997 c 58 § 878; 1990 c 213 § 7.]

***Reviser's note:** 1997 c 58 § 886 requiring a court to order certification of noncompliance with residential provisions of a court-ordered parenting plan was vetoed. Provisions ordering the department of social and health services to certify a responsible parent based on a court order to certify for noncompliance with residential provisions of a parenting plan were vetoed. See RCW 74.20A.320.

Residual balance of funds—Effective date—2013 c 251: See notes following RCW 41.06.280.

Intent—Part headings not law—2006 c 339: See notes following RCW 74.34.020.

Finding—Intent—1999 c 292: See note following RCW 64.44.010.

Short title—Part headings, captions, table of contents not law—Exemptions and waivers from federal law—Conflict with federal requirements—Severability—1997 c 58: See RCW 74.08A.900 through 74.08A.904.

Effective dates—Intent—1997 c 58: See notes following RCW 74.20A.320.

RCW 64.44.070 Rules and standards—Chapter administration, property decontamination. (1) The state board of health shall promulgate rules and standards for carrying out the provisions in this chapter in accordance with chapter 34.05 RCW, the administrative procedure act. The local board of health and the local health officer are authorized to exercise such powers as may be necessary to carry out this chapter. The department may provide technical assistance to local health boards and health officers to carry out their duties under this chapter.

(2) The department shall adopt rules for decontamination of a property used as a laboratory for the production of controlled substances and methods for the testing of porous and nonporous surfaces, groundwater, surface water, soil, and septic tanks for contamination. The rules shall establish decontamination standards for hazardous chemicals, including but not limited to methamphetamine, lead, mercury, and total volatile organic compounds. [2009 c 495 § 7; 2006 c 339 § 207; 1999 c 292 § 8; 1990 c 213 § 9.]

Effective date—2009 c 495: See note following RCW 43.20.050.

Intent—Part headings not law—2006 c 339: See notes following RCW 74.34.020.

Finding—Intent—1999 c 292: See note following RCW 64.44.010.

RCW 64.44.075 Annual evaluation and inspection of decontamination projects. The department may evaluate annually a number of the property decontamination projects performed by licensed contractors to determine the adequacy of the decontamination work, using the services of an independent environmental contractor or state or local agency. If a project fails the evaluation and inspection, the contractor is subject to a civil penalty and license suspension, pursuant to RCW 64.44.060 (4) and (5); and the contractor is prohibited from performing additional work until deficiencies have been corrected. [2006 c 339 § 208.]

Intent—Part headings not law—2006 c 339: See notes following RCW 74.34.020.

RCW 64.44.080 Civil liability—Immunity. Members of the state board of health and local boards of health, local health officers, and employees of the department of health and local health departments are immune from civil liability arising out of the performance of their duties under this chapter, unless such performance constitutes gross negligence or intentional misconduct. [1990 c 213 § 10.]

RCW 64.44.900 Application—Other remedies. This chapter shall not limit state or local government authority to act under any other statute, including chapter 35.80 or 7.48 RCW. [1990 c 213 § 11.]