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Weak standards worry family in former meth house

By ABC7

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It's a serious concern for people buying or renting a home -- the manufacture of meth leaves behind dangerous chemicals, long after the lab is gone. But, how much meth would you accept in your home? The state's come up with a controversial answer.

It was supposed to be Margarita Gutierrez's perfect home.

"I moved here expecting it was a nice home," she said.

Instead what she rented was a meth house.

"I didn't even know about it," Gutierrez said.

The I-Team found Gutierrez's house in a state database of former meth labs and broke the news to her.

Her first thought was her kids' health.

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The I-Team's tests found the drug in Gutierrez's house -- it's measured in micrograms of meth per 100 square centimeters. The I-Team's composite sample from her kitchen, windows and heater came back at .61 -- six times over the old limit of .1, but under California's new limit of 1.5, which went into effect in 2010.

"Why change it? What's the difference from then and now? I don't understand it. It should be 0.0," Gutierrez said.

In fact, only California and Wyoming allow a 1.5 limit -- most of the states with meth regulations use the 0.1, the lowest level that can be detected by a standard test.

"Nobody really knew what the relationship of that number was to the potential health impact on the residents living there," state toxicologist Charles Salocks Ph.D. said.

Salocks authored the study recommending the looser 1.5 limit for meth residue. He says cleanup companies were having trouble scrubbing down to the .1 standard, so the state decided to take a new approach.

"Our new standard was based on assessment of potential risks to human health," Salocks said.

Salocks' study is the first on the real health dangers of meth residue. He came up with the 1.5 level by looking at studies of similar, prescribed drugs from the amphetamine family, such as Ritalin.

"Identified basically, a threshold dose for methamphetamine effects in humans; it's probably less than 5 mg per individual," Salocks said. "A 5 mg dose is a dose that will produce effects in humans, but very subtle effects."

Meth Lab Cleanup Company CEO Joe Mazzuca has been decontaminating meth homes for almost a decade -- his company specializes in it.

"In my opinion it was very misrepresentative to the public," Mazzuca said.

He thinks California got it wrong when it allowed more meth residue to stay in homes

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Mazucca doesn't believe Salocks' study is realistic because it looked at prescribed doses of medicines that are similar to methamphetamine, not the meth made in someone's home.

Mazucca says the new California standard does not address the other hazardous chemicals created when cooking meth, such as phosphine and iodine.

Salocks says he didn't have to.

"Our directive from the legislature was to develop a cleanup standard for meth," Salocks said. "There is sort of a tacit assumption that if you cleanup methamphetamine to the standard that we came up with, that you will be cleaning up the other chemicals as well."

The unknowns are adding up for Margarita Gutierrez and her family.

"How do I know this won't jeopardize their lives in three to five years?" Gutierrez asked.

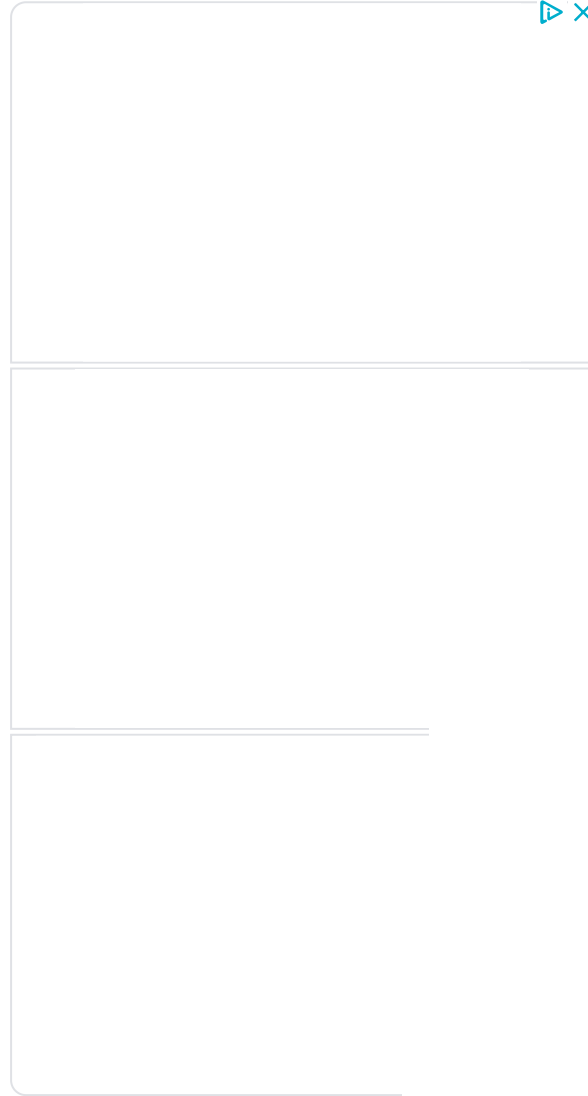
She says she'll get more information about the next place they live, and make sure it's not a meth house.

"Before you move in a home, make sure you get it tested or find out because this could be you" Gutierrez said.

The I-Team did a second test just on Gutierrez's heater -- it came back more than twice the state's limit. Her landlord claims he didn't know the house was busted for meth either, but will do whatever it takes to clean it up.

If you have a question about a home, those tests cost about \$45 -- you can do it yourself.

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