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cooks than when they went in," Sgt. Tim McCarthy of the Eugene police said.

Pizzo said one group of cooks in Portland was arrested three times in three weeks, twice at the same house. The third bust netted about 65 gallons of chemicals.

Authorities still must deal with sludges, chemicals and contaminated equipment. Until recently, police had to transfer and store the mess, but they are now getting help from the DEQ.

The state legislature gave the DEQ \$250,000 in 1987 to contract with environmental cleanup firms to categorize, package and transfer chemicals to temporary storage areas.

Workers from environmental cleanup companies like Portland's Riedel Environmental Services must wear protective gear to classify and carefully pack chemicals into 55-gallon drums for shipment.

Permanent storage, with its risks of leaks and explosions, is another problem police and fire agencies are ill-equipped to handle, and the DEQ is contracting these jobs out as well. Some of the chemicals can be recycled, but much of the material will be incinerated or placed in landfills.

The DEQ funding was authorized too late to help Eugene with its initial round of categorization, packing and transfer. The city spent almost \$30,000 on waste disposal in the past 12 months, Eugene police Public Information Officer Tim Birr said.

The DEQ has already spent \$80,000 of the state's money and will use at least \$75,000 more to handle the backlog of chemicals now stored at police departments across Oregon. Eyer thinks the DEQ will use up the remainder of the \$250,000 by July 1, 1988.

DEQ Public Information Officer Carolyn Young agreed that funding is insufficient to last until the legislature meets again in 1989. She said she wishes the agency could be of more use.

"What we're doing is not enough," Young said. "This is a serious problem that's going to have to be addressed on a lot of fronts."

Helpful as it is to police, the DEQ actually is somewhat limited in what it can do. No attempt is made to decontaminate the premises, a job that Eyer estimates would cost a

minimum of \$5,000 a site.

In fact, no agency will give a former lab site anything resembling a clean bill of health, and that raises legal questions for landlords and tenants.

"The biggest unknown at this time is what advice to give to a property owner after the property has been used for a lab," said Rich Reiter, DEQ hazardous materials section manager.

A potential safety problem for future occupants may exist, according to Stan Petrask, manager for the Lane County Community Health and Social Services Department.

"Spills permeate into wood, sheetrock and concrete," Petrask said. "You can remove floors and sheetrock, but the studs may still be a problem."

Petrask said existing county procedures call for informing owners of structures where methamphetamine has been manufactured that the premises are considered hazardous. Renting or living in the buildings after this warning is at the owner's risk.

Rental owners whose properties have been used as labs may face serious cleaning or decontamination problems.

A Eugene property owner, who asked that her name be withheld due to pending litigation involving a tenant arrested for cooking meth on her property, described trying to clean up following a lab bust.

"The smell was so nauseating you could not stand to be in there more than 10 minutes," she said, and added that local police and health officials were unable to tell her whether the property is permanently unsafe.

There is no known method of decontaminating former lab sites, according to Petrask. It also is legally impossible to force closure of sites at present.

"You can't legally close a building when you can't tell people how to clean it up," Petrask said.

The Oregon State Health Division has formed the Clandestine Drug Lab Committee to work on ordinances designed to limit public access to lab sites, according to committee chair Dr. Jane Gordon.

Marion County's Hansen is drafting one ordinance for the committee that would allow courts to declare former lab sites nuisances. The owner or mortgage company would have a chance to respond, but the court would make the final ruling.

The ban on living in houses declared to be nuisances could be lifted if the structure is decontaminated and certified safe, but the property owner ultimately is responsible for costs, Hansen said.

"The owner is stuck with that," he said. "Maybe you didn't realize the risk was there when you bought...but it is."

There are some Portland landlords who would like to demolish structures considered contaminated by meth wastes, said Doug Miller, housing services supervisor for the City of Portland. But he added that concern over possible toxic dusts and fumes being released during demolition means the buildings will stand for now.

"No demolition company will touch them," Miller said. "We don't know if we can demolish them...If they are permeated, how do you dispose of them?"

Agencies, police, renters and property owners are faced with the multitude of problems meth cooks leave in their wake. Reiter summed up some of the frustration he and others feel at trying to get real progress in the near future.

"You normally think of government as being able to help," Reiter said. "In this situation, being candid, we can't offer much help."



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