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Columbia firm cleans up former meth lab to give family peace of mind
HISCO Environmental LLC donates \$9,200 in services to Tennessee family in need

COLUMBIA, SC Sept. ??, 2009--“Thank you for cleaning my house.” The words are simple, yet profound coming from golden-haired Ethan Holt.

Because for every one of his four years of life, Ethan’s house has made him sick.

Ethan passed those words of thanks to a team from HISCO Environmental LLC, a Columbia, SC-based company that specializes in remediation, or clean-up of toxic structures. The three-man team traveled some 300 miles to the Holt home in central Tennessee at the end of August and donated the company’s professional services after hearing of the family plight from national media sources.

And now the word is official: According to an independent inspection by an industrial hygienist, there are no detectible methamphetamines levels in the structure. The Holts can return to their home.

“I knew that we had the answer to what could get them back in their home,” said Arnie Litchfield, vice president of operations for HISCO. “I read about the health complications they were having, and I know that what HISCO does would eliminate it.”

HISCO is one of only three distributors nationwide of a revolutionary product that neutralizes methamphetamine residue. The product, Crystal Clean, works in one treatment, bonding with toxins on a molecular level and leaving behind only a harmless chemical that is simply wiped away.

Some 21 states have laws that deal with clean-up of former methamphetamine lab sites. But widely varying safety standards and misinformation about how to clean them can mean financial ruin and, even worse, deadly health consequences for families that discover their homes have a meth history.

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Five-year health nightmare

In 2004, Jason and Rhonda Holt bought what appeared to be a nice house in Winchester, Tenn. to start their newlywed lives together. They invested tens of thousands of dollars in renovations and improvements, sinking a total of \$140,000 into the home. Within a year, they welcomed Ethan into the family.

What no one told them, and what they couldn't see, was that the house was a former methamphetamines lab. The drugs cooked in their kitchen by the previous resident left a lingering toxic residue in the paint, on floors, cabinets, carpet and in the air ducts.

“Even if you only do the methamphetamine cook in the kitchen, it really contaminates the entire house,” said John Martyny, Ph.D., a researcher at the National Jewish Medical and Research Center in Denver. “It’s a small particle that behaves like a gas, so anywhere a gas moves, the methamphetamine moves.”

Ethan’s troubles began with breathing problems at six months old. Chronic respiratory issues led to surgery before he celebrated his first birthday, and would continue to plague him as long as he lived there.

When his sister Anna was born, the troubles started earlier and became even more severe. Anna went into respiratory arrest at just five months old and was put on a monitor that would sound an alarm if she stopped breathing. Her lungs, constantly irritated by the invisible meth vapors, required breathing treatments morning and night, and then daily steroid shots. She struggled every day to breathe.

The problems started for baby sister McKenzie just 17 days after she was born in late 2007. Tiny and unable to breathe on her own, she was hospitalized at Vanderbilt Medical Center for four days.

Jason Holt, although still in his 20s, developed kidney problems. Rhonda Holt experienced debilitating migraines and had to call on family and friends for help. Doctors advised the family to keep the children isolated and at home to avoid respiratory irritants like allergens and germs from other children.

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In January this year Anna's problems worsened. A lung biopsy and other tests revealed density in her right lower lung. Doctors said Anna suffered from bronchial myalgia and tracheal myalgia, which caused her airways to collapse whenever she coughed. The lung specialist didn't give the Holts much encouragement about their daughter's future.

Soon after, Rhonda was talking to a neighbor about Anna's problems when she learned the home's previous owner's son had been arrested there for cooking methamphetamines.

"My jaw just dropped," Rhonda Holt said. "She told us that we needed to have the house checked out for meth because she thought they used to cook it there."

A subsequent test of the house by an industrial hygienist confirmed that it was contaminated with toxic methamphetamines. In February the family packed up their children and left everything behind, moving in with Jason's parents.

"Our full intention of buying the house was that we could make it really nice," Rhonda Holt said. "We bought three acres so our kids could run and play and have fun. That news was all our hopes and dreams shot down the drain. But the lives of our children are worth so much more."

Better health, but peace of mind

Soon after moving out, the family's health improved. Ethan and his sisters began to exhibit new energy and became more active in their cramped but healthy home.

Meanwhile, their parents faced a financial nightmare. Their life savings were spent on a sick house and countless ambulance rides, doctor visits and medical treatments. The cleanup "expert" they consulted estimated the job would cost \$40,000--money they didn't have. But with the help of family, friends and a supportive community, the Holt family took the expert's advice and gutted the house, stripping it down to the studs. They threw out all the contents and kept only a new couch and, for sentimental reasons, the children's bassinette.

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Every surface was cleaned with a bleach solution, as recommended. But the family still didn't feel comfortable moving back in, because studies show that bleach cleaning often doesn't eliminate the methamphetamines, or even bring the residue down to safe levels. What's more, bleach-based cleaners can leave behind their own toxic byproducts.

"Even after three washes using Simple Green or other cleaners, a lot of methamphetamines stay behind," said Martyny, who has also conducted research comparing Crystal Clean to products like Formula 409 and Clorox Cleanup.

"At the time I contacted them they had been through about \$20,000 dollars just tearing things out and cleaning, and that didn't include any remodeling," Litchfield said. "They had no peace of mind and didn't know what direction to go. They were at a dead end."

"I hated that we didn't know about it earlier because we could have saved them so much," he added. "There was no need to gut the house, or even to throw out all of their furniture."

Martyny's study found that just one application of Crystal Clean on painted drywall leaves behind no detectable levels of methamphetamine. Field tests by EFT confirm the products effectiveness of eliminating the residue.

"It oxidizes the meth. The instant you treat it, it's gone," Martyny said. "It changes the methamphetamine toxins pretty much into innocuous chemicals."

Donated de-tox

Litchfield and his partner were determined to help the Holts, so they contacted Kevin Irvine, vice president and general manager of Environmental Foam Technologies (EFT) of Huntsville, Ala., which manufactures Crystal Clean. Within weeks, HISCO agreed to donate the labor, worth about \$9,200, and EFT donated \$2,310 of the cleaner.

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On Thursday, Aug. 27, Litchfield and two employees donned Tyvec environmental suits and decontaminated the Holt family home in just six hours. EFT's Irvine was also on hand. The Holt family came out to observe the operation, bringing home-grown watermelon, locally produced ham and heartfelt thanks.

"I can't express in words what that has meant to us," said Rhonda Holt, fighting back tears. "They have truly blessed our hearts and blessed everyone in this community. They have given us a gift...I can't compare it to anything else. The sense of knowing that the house is clean, I just can't say thank you enough."

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For further reading, please see Dr. Martyny's research here:

<http://health.utah.gov/meth/html/Decontamination/Oxidizerdecontamination.pdf>

About HISCO Environmental LLC

HISCO Environmental LLC is the premier mold and methamphetamine decontamination company in the U.S., offering the most cost-effective, efficient and unobtrusive means of removing contaminants from your home or business. For more information about rapidly restoring the interior quality of your home or business to a completely safe environment, go to <http://www.hiscoenvironmental.com/contact.html>.