74-year-old woman suffers symptoms, meth detected in her apartment
Posted 10:38 pm, October 30, 2013, by Annie Cutler

"OGDEN, Utah — A 74-year-old woman is out of her home and recovering from symptoms she has because she was exposed to methamphetamine in her home, or so she says.

She lived at the Valencia Apartments at 461 East 27th Street in Ogden.

Maxine McNeeley had been in her apartment for the last two years, and she said it was just three months after she started living there that her health started to decline.

The sign on her door says it all. McNeeley’s apartment is closed to occupancy because of chemical contamination, specifically methamphetamine.

“I wasn’t sleeping well, I wasn’t breathing well, I’d never had those problems before,” McNeely said.

After hearing about the previous tenant, and her health not improving, McNeely took matters into her own hands. She said it was her daughter who ordered a home testing kit, and when the results from that test were above the state regulated levels for methamphetamine, she said that’s when she told the landlord of the problem.

Weber Morgan Health Department officials said a certified test confirmed the levels of meth in McNeeley’s unit were higher than the state standard, but not very high.

Brian Cowan, deputy director of environmental health, said even those levels can be enough to harm some people.

“The levels that were sampled in this apartment probably wouldn’t affect most people, but the elderly, children, and people with immune-compromised systems are usually more susceptible.”

McNeeley said now that she’s out of the unit she’s feeling better, but she said she worries about lingering and long-term health impacts of her exposure.

“When you’re exposed to something that was beyond your control, and it’s harmful and hazardous, it makes me angry and I worry about it, yeah,” she said.

FOX 13 News reached out the attorney representing the landlord, who responded with the following statement:

“In response to Ms. McNeely’s concerns, The Valencia apartment has taken all reasonable and appropriate measures to remediate the problem. The apartment community immediately ordered a professional meth contamination test and subsequent remediation efforts. In addition, Ms. McNeely was immediately offered another apartment unit within the Valencia apartment community or one of its sister communities. Ultimately, apartment management helped Ms. McNeely secure alternative
housing through the Weber County Housing Authority.

The Valencia apartment takes claims of meth contamination seriously and performs tests any time reasonable suspicion of contamination is brought to their attention. In Ms. McNeeley’s case, the apartment community was not aware of any reason her unit may be exposed to meth contamination. Ms. McNeeley never brought her concerns of meth contamination to management until after she obtained the results of her own self-test kit. At that time, management took immediate action and offered to help Ms. McNeeley with her housing situation. While the meth contamination levels were undeniably above the legal limits, the exposure levels were relatively minimal and there is no reason to believe any of Ms. McNeeley’s personal property has been cross-contaminated. The apartment community is awaiting further results of the remediation efforts to assess further action though.

In addition to Ms. McNeeley, the Valencia apartments are also a victim in this situation. Due to the unknown, real perpetrator’s illegal methamphetamine use in the apartment unit, the Valencia must now spend thousands of dollars to remediate that particular unit. It is, therefore, in the Valencia apartment’s best interest to appropriately screen all of their tenants and take immediate and appropriate action anytime the use of illegal substances is brought to their attention.”

Health experts said symptoms of methamphetamine exposure can vary depending on the person, but they typical symptoms include headaches, dizziness, some respiratory distress, and what’s referred to as flu-like symptoms.