

CASE STUDY

SUICIDE CLEANUP – SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

August is a hot time of year for most of the US. In New Mexico, the temperature remains warm but steady, averaging 84 degrees. While it may be a great time to visit the pool, it can make some already challenging jobs increasingly difficult.

On one summer afternoon, a homeowner phoned Aftermath to describe a tragic, yet familiar situation: the man's father committed suicide in the garage of the condo, and the family was concerned about the biological fluids that were left behind. Not only did they remind relatives of the horrible event, but the customer knew they could pose a health risk and could potentially damage the home.

Suicide cleanup is just one the many services Aftermath provides. Employees understand how important it is to get the home back to normal as soon as possible. Technicians were dispatched right away to handle the case. What they discovered on arrival was a two foot by two foot pool of blood and bio located at the entry point leading from the home into the garage. Despite the heat, they knew they had to get to work.

Many times when a person commits suicide, they try to do so in a place where they believe their death will cause the least amount of damage and hardship for their families. Basements and garages are common locations, but there are several unique complications with these spaces, as this situation demonstrated. One common misconception is that floors in these areas are easiest to clean. In actuality, concrete is still porous, and even the smallest crack can trap bacteria well beyond the reach of even the most determined cleanup crew. In these situations, Aftermath may recommend the removal and replacement of concrete, if the area cannot be fully disinfected. However, such extensive home repair can be expensive. In this case, the customer asked that all material be removed except the concrete, to avoid a costly remodel. This meant that technicians would have to repeat the cleaning process several times before applying a sealant to protect the family and the home.

This was not the only challenge the technicians faced. While wearing heavy duty work gloves and full PPE, workers prepared the site for extensive cleaning, determined to remove as much of the stain as possible. They immediately learned that the area was difficult to ventilate, due to a lack of windows. This meant that the workers inside the garage had to be exceedingly cautious; PPE suits are warm, and when technicians are working, they can become susceptible to heat stroke and dehydration. Frequent breaks and regular water are necessary to keep workers safe.

After setting up several zones to prevent cross contamination, Aftermath employees donned puncture resistant gloves and used scrapers to remove all excess biological material from the affected area. Next, affected items such as the door frame and a nearby shelving unit were then broken into manageable pieces for proper disposal. Proprietary chemicals were then used with towels to remove the remaining biological fluids from the concrete floor. Once clean, technicians tested the areas for remaining bacteria. Once they were satisfied with the results, epoxy sealant was applied to the concrete floor to seal away any remaining biological contaminants. While it is always safer to remove a possible source of bacteria, the customer's wishes were followed and the family was satisfied with the end result.