

## How This Ex-Police Officer Found a Business in Cleaning Up Crime Scenes, Hoarders' Homes



When Laura Spaulding busted meth labs or walked through crime scenes as a police officer with the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department, she sometimes thought about what happened after the squad cars pulled away. Who would clean up the fingerprint dust and the blood? What would happen to the property?

As she worked the scene of a home shooting in 2005, a distraught mother kept asking when the police would take care of the mess. Although cleanup is the responsibility of the homeowner, Spaulding took pity on the woman and said she'd come back after her shift and do it, and that they could bill the homeowner's insurance. It was an act of kindness, but it led Spaulding to a revelation: a potential business in crime-scene cleanup.

Spaulding continued cleaning crime scenes while off-duty, working out of her trunk. But soon business was so good that she handed in her badge and moved back to her hometown of Tampa, Fla., to build her company, Spaulding Decon. Now, after almost a decade of perfecting her cleaning systems, she is attempting to franchise the gory business.

So what will potential franchisees face? "We deal with crime scenes, including homicides and suicides. We do tear-gas remediation and natural deaths," Spaulding explains. "We do a lot of hoarding cases, too, like what you see on TV. Most of the time we're dealing with

homeowners and property managers, but we deal with a lot of businesses like gas stations and hotels, too.”

What really sets Spaulding Decon apart from the many mom-and-pop operations in the \$358 million crime-scene-cleanup industry is its proprietary techniques for meth-lab cleanup. “There are meth labs everywhere, and they definitely doubled during the recession,” Spaulding claims. While the police usually remove the chemicals and toxic materials, residues remain all over the property, in the air ducts and on the walls. The worst part, however, is that only 24 states require property owners to properly clean up former meth factories. And that can be deadly.

“We’ve had everything from people calling about babies getting sick to dogs licking the carpet and dying,” Spaulding says. “We had a lady who bought a foreclosure and had no idea it had been a meth lab, then two months later she got very ill. That’s why we go in with Tyvek suits and respirators. It looks like a scene from *Breaking Bad*.”

Spaulding believes that franchising will help her expand her business while maintaining quality control. In the past, she has signed multi-state accounts, which meant subcontracting to other companies, and that didn’t work out well.

“We couldn’t control the quality,” she says. “At the same time, we didn’t want to give away our proprietary techniques to potential competitors. That’s why we decided to franchise.”

Spaulding launched the franchise program last summer but so far has had no takers. She remains confident that some intrepid individuals will take a shot with the business. “We want to have someone very involved,” she says. “We find the business excels at a faster rate when the owner takes part in the operations. It’s an extremely physical job, so it’s definitely not for the out-of-shape. Typically, we’re looking for people from the military, law enforcement, off-duty firemen or paramedics. People who won’t be bothered by the ‘ick’ factor.”