

A public health nuisance is a legally actionable condition that violates Ohio's rules and regulations and has the potential to threaten the public health of a community. A Board of Health must assure all public health nuisances are removed within its jurisdiction and is given the power to compel the owners, occupants or tenants of any lot, property, building, or structure to do so. They may also prosecute such persons for neglect or refusal to obey such orders. The Meigs County Health Department (MCHD) investigates numerous public health nuisance complaints each year. In 2024, there were 46 public health nuisance complaints investigated by the health department. These complaints involved a wide range of public health concerns including: 18 cases of improper disposal of garbage or solid waste, 13 cases of faulty septic systems, 10 cases of food service complaints, 2 cases of tick identification requests, 1 case of a mold complaint in a public building, 1 case of unsanitary household conditions, requesting a statement of conditions, and 1 case of bedbug identification confirmation.

Other common public health nuisance complaints that the Health Department receives are accumulation of scrap tires, mosquitos, rats, swimming pools holding stagnant water, open dumping of trash or demolition debris, open burning of solid waste, improper disposal of used oil or other hazardous wastes, and unsanitary outdoor conditions caused by pets.

In most cases of a public health nuisance complaint, a person must submit the complaint in writing before an investigation can be conducted. These forms may be submitted anonymously. All complaints have the potential to be settled in court so having documentation of the complaint is very important. Complaint forms can be picked up in the health department office or may be downloaded from www.meigs-health.com. Ohio's 'sunshine laws' allow the public to view any or all public records including written complaints filed with the department after the investigation is resolved.

Once a complaint is received, an investigation will be conducted by an Environmental Health Specialist to determine if a "public health nuisance" does exist. Sometimes the nature of the complaint does not come under the authority of the health department. For example, the nuisances regarding high weeds or grass, junk automobiles, vacant houses or buildings, scrap metal recycling, or landlord/tenant disputes cannot be prosecuted by the Board of Health; however, other government agencies may have that authority, such as villages with zoning ordinances.

If a public health nuisance is observed, ample time is given to the individual to abate the nuisance. If orders are not met within the allotted time, the case is referred to the Board of Health, where legal action may be brought against the individual. The individual may provide reasoning to the Board of Health as to why the nuisance had not been abated within the given time. When legal action is requested, the case is referred to the County Prosecutor. Then the matter will be resolved in court and fines and jail time could be assessed.

It is the mission of the MCHD to preserve, promote, and protect the health and well-being of Meigs County citizens. We appreciate when property owners do their part in helping us with our mission. For more information contact the Meigs County Health Department at 740-992-6626 Monday-Friday from 8AM-4PM.

Elizabeth Fisher

Registered Environmental Health Specialist

