



Martie Law of Absolute Bio-Recovery Service Inc. cleans a hoarder house near Bellevue last month.

JACOB HANNAH/Lincoln Journal Star

Cleaning up life's messes

Tidying scenes of crime, death and filth is becoming a growth industry.

By NICHOLAS BERGIN
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A blue jumpsuit with matching gloves means Martie Law will spend her day cleaning blood, bodily fluids and thicker things.

Purple gloves and a yellow chemical-resistant jumpsuit indicate meth labs.

All white: emptying a hoarder's grimy home.

Law accessorizes each outfit with a face mask and respirator, and occasionally black, puncture-proof gloves.

As founder, president and CEO of Waterloo-based Absolute Bio-Recovery Services Inc., she gets called when a mess is too big, too hazardous, too traumatic or simply too gross.

The company, one of a handful serving eastern Nebraska, specializes in cleanup after crime, death, trauma, disaster and infestation.

Emptying and sanitizing the homes of hoarders makes up the bulk of Absolute Bio-Recovery's work, Law said.

'Who hasn't been touched by some sort of tragedy? And when it happens in the home, you are really in a tough spot.'

— Ritch Paprocki of DeconHero, a cleanup company

Suicides rank as the No. 2 call in Lincoln. In Omaha, it's shootings.

Regardless, Law takes a matter-of-fact attitude to work.

"We had a suicide where the guy was thoughtful and he put a sheet over his head, so it was easy to clean. Then we have had suicides with double (shotgun) barrels in the living room. It's the exact same setting, but a completely different scene."

She loves the work — not out of morbid fascination, but for the continuous challenges. She rights messes teaming with deadly pathogens and filth. She keeps her cellphone close, ready to respond around the clock.

Growth industry

In Nebraska, 15,171 people died

in 2010, the most-recent year for which statistics are available from the state Department of Health and Human Services. That's 8.3 deaths for every 1,000 residents, and of those, 2,151 happened in Lancaster County.

Cancer is the state's leading killer, accounting for 3,437 deaths, followed by heart disease with 3,344. Accidents came in fifth at 696.

With baby boomers aging, many consider death cleanup a growing industry, said Ritch Paprocki of Lincoln-based DeconHero. But that's not the only reason, he said. As society becomes more mobile, parents and children live farther apart, and somebody has to clean up.

In 2011, Lincoln police re-

causes, five homicides, 30 suicides, seven accidental deaths, 11 vehicle fatalities and 79 deaths of unknown cause.

When police finish their interviews and the bodies get rolled away, someone has to put on a jumpsuit.

Paprocki said he sees cleanup as a community service as well as a business.

The majority of DeconHero's business is cleanup of mold caused by water, and he said he wants to avoid a reputation for price-gouging people in mourning.

"When you get that call, it's really hard to tell somebody no," he said. "Who hasn't been touched by some sort of tragedy? And when it happens in the home, you are really in a tough spot."

Costs vary, but Law said the least-expensive suicide she cleaned up cost \$700, while large hoarding jobs can run into the tens of thousands.

Insurance generally pays for