



Environmental Risk FYI

Spring 2004

Environmental Risk Management, Inc.

“ERMI: The Environmental Compliance Specialists”

Points of Interest:

- **Mold 101**
- **Health Effects of “Toxic” Mold**
- **Controlling Mold Growth**
- **See Last Page for our Anniversary Special!!!**

The Mold Issue: Everything You Should Know for Spring 2004

Mold 101:

Most of the mold that’s found indoors comes from an outdoor source. Microscopic mold spores are continually being carried throughout indoor and outdoor air. Mold growth becomes a problem when there’s water damage, high humidity, or dampness in a home or building. All molds need moisture to grow. Common sources of indoor moisture include flooding, roof and plumbing leaks, damp basements and crawl spaces, or anywhere moisture creates condensation. Bathroom showers and steam from cooking will also create a mold problem if a home or building isn’t properly ventilated.



When mold spores land on a damp surface indoors, they begin growing and digesting whatever surface they’re growing on in order to survive. Mold can grow on wood, paper, carpet, and foods. When excessive moisture or water accumulates indoors, mold growth will often occur, particularly if the moisture problem remains undiscovered or un-addressed. Mold will gradually destroy whatever it’s growing on.

Controlling Mold Growth Has Many Health Benefits

Mold spores attach themselves to airborne dust particles. When we inhale, these dust particles are carried into our lungs. Dust particles themselves may not be extremely hazardous, but we also inhale the mold spores, which can be a serious health threat.

Our bodies have natural defense filtering systems (such as mucous lining, coughing and

sneezing) against dusty air, which helps to remove some contaminants, but most contaminants overpower and pass through our defenses. Mold spores not only bypass our defenses because of their number, but also because they're so small.

These mold spores move into, accumulate, and settle into the lower lungs. There they produce toxins. Remember that the lungs transfer oxygen to the bloodstream, and most of the actual exchange of carbon dioxide and oxygen takes place in the lower lungs. Now the lungs become a roadway for toxic materials to travel through the bloodstream with the oxygen. The body's reaction to the toxins permanently affects the lungs' ability to transfer oxygen into the bloodstream. The lung tissue becomes permanently scared and each exposure to mold spores increases the damage.

The body's last defense against mold is to develop an allergy producing cold or pneumonia-like symptom.

Allergic reactions, similar to common pollen or animal allergies, are the most common health effects for individuals who are sensitive to mold. Flu-like symptoms and skin rash may occur. Molds may also aggravate asthma. Fungal infections from mold may occur in people with serious immune disease but this is very rare. Most symptoms are temporary and eliminated by correcting the mold problem in the home or building.

For those who are affected by mold exposure, there can be a wide variation in how they react. People who may be affected more severely and quickly than others include infants and children, elderly people, pregnant women, individuals with respiratory conditions or allergies and asthma and people with weakened immune systems (for example, people with HIV infection, chemotherapy patients, or organ or bone marrow transplant recipients, autoimmune diseases).

Those with special health concerns should consult their doctor if they're concerned about mold exposure.

Steps Toward Mold Control

Controlling excess moisture is the key to preventing and stopping indoor mold growth. Keeping susceptible areas in the home clean and dry is very important. Ventilate or use exhaust fans (to the outdoors) to remove moisture where it accumulates in bathrooms, kitchens, and laundry areas. Be sure your clothes dryer vents to the outside of your home. Repair water leaks promptly, then dry out and clean or replace any water-damaged materials. Materials that stay wet for longer than 48 hours are likely to produce mold growth. Lowering the humidity in the home also helps prevent condensation problems. To lower humidity, air conditioners and dehumidifiers may be used. Proper exterior wall insulation helps prevent condensation inside the home during cold weather that could cause mold growth.

Here are a few steps that can be followed to reduce or prevent mold growth:

- Dry water damaged areas and items within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth.
- Fix leaky plumbing or other sources of water.
- Wash mold off hard surfaces with an approved mold control product, and dry completely. Do not use bleach.

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- Absorbent materials (such as ceiling tiles and carpet) that become moldy may have to be replaced.
- In areas where there is a perpetual moisture problem, do not install carpeting (i.e., by drinking fountains, by sinks, or on concrete floors with leaks or frequent condensation).
- Reduce indoor humidity to decrease mold growth by venting bathrooms, dryers, and other moisture-generating sources to the outside; using air conditioners and de-humidifiers; increasing ventilation; and using exhaust fans whenever cooking, dishwashing, and cleaning.

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