Mold Control and Cleanup Basics[i]

Mold Control Basics

- The key to mold control is moisture control.
- If mold is a problem in your home, you should clean up the mold promptly and fix the water problem.
- It is important to dry water-damaged areas and items within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth.

Mold Cleanup Basics

Act quickly. Mold damages what it grows on. The longer it grows, the more damage it can cause. If the mold growth covers less than 10 square feet you can handle cleanup yourself. *Follow these guidelines:*

- Scrub mold off hard surfaces with detergent and water, and dry completely.
- Fix plumbing leaks and other water problems as soon as possible. Dry all items completely.
- Absorbent or porous materials, such as ceiling tiles and carpet, may have to be thrown away if they become moldy. Mold can grow on or fill in the empty spaces and crevices of porous materials, so the mold may be difficult or impossible to remove completely.
- Avoid exposing yourself or others to mold (see discussions: What to Wear When Cleaning Moldy Areas and Hidden Mold).
- Do not paint or caulk moldy surfaces. Clean up the mold and dry the surfaces before painting. Paint applied over moldy surfaces is likely to peel.
- If you are unsure about how to clean an item, or if the item is expensive or of sentimental value, you may wish to consult a specialist. Specialists in furniture repair, restoration, painting, art restoration and conservation, carpet and rug cleaning, water damage, and fire or water restoration are commonly listed in phone books. Be sure to ask for and check references. Look for specialists who are affiliated with professional organizations.

What to Wear When Cleaning Moldy Areas

Wear an N-95 respirator to avoid breathing in mold or mold spores. These respirators are available at many hardware stores and from companies that advertise on the Internet. (They cost about $12 to $25.) Some N-95 respirators resemble a paper dust mask with a nozzle on the front, others are made primarily of plastic or rubber and have removable cartridges that trap most of the mold spores from entering. In order to be effective, the respirator or mask must fit properly, so carefully follow the instructions supplied with the respirator.

Wear gloves. Long gloves that extend to the middle of the forearm are recommended. When working with water and a mild detergent, ordinary household rubber gloves may be used. If you are using a disinfectant, a biocide such as chlorine bleach, or a strong cleaning solution, you should select gloves made from natural rubber, neoprene, nitrile, polyurethane, or PVC (see Cleanup and Biocides). Avoid touching mold or moldy items with your bare hands.

Wear goggles. Goggles that do not have ventilation holes are recommended. Avoid getting mold or mold spores in your eyes

Cleanup and Biocides

Biocides are substances that can destroy living organisms. The use of a chemical or biocide that kills organisms such as mold (chlorine bleach, for example) is not recommended as a routine practice during mold cleanup. There may be instances, however, when professional judgment may indicate its use (for example, when immune-compromised individuals are present). In most cases, it is not possible or desirable to sterilize an area; a background level of mold spores will remain - these spores will not grow if the moisture problem has been resolved. If you choose to use disinfectants or biocides, always ventilate the area and exhaust the air to the outdoors. Never mix chlorine bleach solution with other cleaning solutions or detergents that contain ammonia because toxic fumes could be produced. *Please note:* Dead mold may still cause allergic reactions in some people, so it is not enough to simply kill the mold, it must also be removed.

Bathroom Tip

Places that are often or always damp can be hard to maintain completely free of mold. If there's some mold in the shower or elsewhere in the bathroom that seems to reappear, increasing the ventilation (running a fan or opening a window) and cleaning frequently will usually prevent mold from recurring, or at least keep the mold to a minimum.

Testing or Sampling for Mold

Is sampling for mold needed? In most cases, if visible mold growth is present, sampling is unnecessary. Since no EPA or other federal limits have been set for mold or mold spores, sampling cannot be used to check a building's compliance with federal mold standards. Surface sampling may be useful to determine if an area has been adequately cleaned or remediated. Sampling for mold should be conducted by professionals who have specific experience in designing mold sampling protocols, sampling methods, and interpreting results. Sample analysis should follow analytical methods recommended by the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA), the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH), or other professional organizations.

Other Important Guidelines

- If there has been a lot of water damage, and/or mold growth covers more than 10 square feet, contact your local Health Department or Cooperative Extension for information about doing larger mold cleanup jobs.
- If the water and/or mold damage was caused by sewage or other contaminated water, then call in a professional who has experience cleaning and fixing buildings damaged by contaminated water.
- If you have health concerns, consult a health professional before starting cleanup.

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[i] The material in this Information Sheet was obtained from the United States Environmental Protection Agency publication *A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home* (http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/images/moldguide.pdf)

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8/6/2002