

Mold must go and the 6 things to know

If a basement is musty, if there are black, green or purple blotches on or behind the walls and ceiling tile, or if there is any kind of growth thriving under the carpets or rugs, then the home is probably living side-by-side with a colony of mold. This is a potential health danger for any family and also a legal liability for you and your clients. Because of the fear over mold contamination there are so many lawsuits flying around today that sales of resale homes are in jeopardy in some cities and insurance companies are scrambling to avoid liability – with some U.S. insurers *refusing* to write any new homeowner policies. So what do you need to know about mold to best serve your clients and keep yourself out of trouble? Well, here we go...

1. *Molds are everywhere and have been around forever.* Many people have the impression that this is a new problem – “attack of the killer molds” – and that we now have to arm ourselves against them. Nothing has changed but the awareness and instead of focusing on total elimination focus on prevention and control. This is easy: Sunlight and ventilation are key.

2. *Use common sense in your approach to mold.* Excessive exposure can cause symptoms in anyone. Asthmatics and other people with sensitivities (such as infants and the elderly) will be particularly prone to increased asthma attacks, even with moderate exposure to molds. In particular, people with *chronic obstructive pulmonary* disorders should be particularly wary of molds. Examples of common sense? Reduce indoor humidity 30-60% by venting bathrooms, dryers and other moisture-generating sources to the outside; use air conditioners and de-humidifiers; increase ventilation; use exhaust fans for cooking, dishwashing, cleaning. Also, reduce condensation on cold surfaces by adding insulation (windows, piping, exterior walls, roof, floors, etc.).

3. *You cannot spot the feared “Toxic” or “Black” mold simply by looking at it.* Most molds are black or dark green in color and the only way to determine its type is through laboratory testing. This type of mold is also known by its technical names of *Stachybotrys Chartarum* or *Stachybotrys atra*.

4. *Most of the media attention surrounding Stachybotrys is overblown.* In statements surrounding mold in residential construction, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) does not believe that there is not any difference between *Stachybotrys* and any other mold. It just so happens that since this mold may grow more commonly on building materials, it is the one that happens to be most present in most homes. It's not any more toxic than other molds and the steps taken to remediate *Stachybotrys* should be the same as that for any other mold presence.

5. *Mold can be cleaned and corrected.* If you find mold on a hard, non-porous surface, it can be cleaned with a 1:16 bleach to water solution (only after first opening a window and wearing non-porous gloves and protective eyewear) as long as the area is less than 10 ft². If more than 10 ft² needs to be cleaned, consult the EPA's guide titled *Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings* (this also applies to residential buildings and you can get it free by calling the EPA Indoor Air Quality Information Clearinghouse at (800) 438-4318, or by going to the EPA web site at http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold_remediation.html). If the affected material is porous, it should be removed and thrown away. If the porous material mold is extensive, you should contact professionals to gather and remove. Lastly, NEVER and I mean NEVER mix household cleaners. I bring this up only because varying sources will offer various chemical solutions to clean mold such as bleach, ammonia, and chlorine. Some may think that they'll get even better results if they mix these chemicals – don't! If you do, you just might end up with something as deadly as mustard gas!

6. *Always get the home professionally inspected.* While the knowledge in this article is good and it's always smart to arm yourself with enough information to properly handle any situation, you are not to be mistaken as the mold expert. A professional home inspector will bear the responsibility of the mechanical, structural, and in most cases the environmental conditions of the home once they are hired by the client, releasing you from that burden. The inspector will assess the situation and put it into the proper perspective (believe it or not, I have seen a big deal made from some mold on a wall because some water was spilled from a fish tank when the home was vacated) for both you and your clients and make the call to refer it to the professionals if a "Red Flag" is discovered.

So there you have it...the nuts & bolts to mold within our homes. Further information on mold can be found on the website of The U.S. EPA at www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html or at the website of the Center for disease control at www.cdc.gov/mold.