

## What Property Owners Should Know About Mold

Mold – Lately, mold has been in the news. Mold is a type of fungus. It occurs naturally in the environment, and it is necessary for the natural decomposition of plant and other organic material. It spreads by means of microscopic spores borne on the wind, and is found everywhere life can be sustained. Building construction is not, and cannot be, designed to exclude mold spores. If the growing conditions are right, mold can grow in your building. Most property owners are familiar with mold growth in the form of bread mold, and mold that may grow on bathroom tile. It can also grow on heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, plumbing systems, walls, support beams and other components of a building.

In order to grow, mold requires a food source. This might be supplied by items found in the building such as fabric carpet or even wallpaper, or by building materials such as drywall, wood, and insulation, to name a few. Also mold growth requires a temperature climate. The best growth occurs at temperatures between 40 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Finally, mold growth requires moisture. Moisture is the only growth factor that can be controlled in a building. By minimizing moisture, a property owner can reduce or eliminate mold growth.

Moisture in the building can have many causes. Spills, leaks, overflows, condensation, and high humidity are common sources of building moisture. Good housekeeping and home maintenance practices are essential in the effort to prevent or eliminate mold growth. If moisture is allowed to remain on the growth medium, mold can develop within 24 to 48 hours.

Consequences of Mold. All mold is not necessarily harmful, but certain strains of mold have been shown to have adverse health effects in susceptible persons. The most common effects are allergic reactions, including skin irritation, watery eyes, runny nose, coughing, sneezing, congestion, sore throat and headache. Individuals with suppressed immune systems may risk infections. Some experts contend that mold causes serious symptoms and diseases which may even be life threatening. However, experts disagree about the level of mold exposure that may cause health problems, and about the exact nature and extent of the health problems that may be caused by mold.

## What the Property Owner Can Do About Mold

The property owner can take positive steps to reduce or eliminate the occurrence of mold growth in the building, and thereby minimize any possible adverse effects that may be caused by mold.

These steps include the following:

1. Before bringing items into the building, check for signs of mold. Potted plants (roots and soil), furniture, furnishings or stored clothing and bedding material, as well as many other items, could already contain mold growth.
2. Regular vacuuming and cleaning will help reduce mold levels. Mild bleach solution and most tile cleaners are effective in eliminating or preventing mold growth.
3. Keep the humidity in the building low. Vent clothes dryers to the outdoors. Ventilate kitchens and bathrooms by opening the windows, by using exhaust fans, or by running the air-conditioning to remove excess moisture in the air, and to facilitate evaporation of water from wet surfaces.
4. Promptly clean up spills, condensation, and other sources of moisture. Thoroughly dry any wet surfaces or material. Do not let water pool or stand in your building. Promptly replace any material that cannot be thoroughly dried, such as drywall or insulation.
5. Inspect for leaks on a regular basis. Look for discoloration or wet spots. Repair any leaks promptly. Inspect condensation pans (refrigerators and air conditioners) for mold growth. Take notice of musty odors, and any visible signs of mold.
6. Should mold develop, thoroughly clean the affected area with a mild solution of bleach. First, test to see if the affected material or surface is color safe. Porous materials, such as fabric, upholstery or carpet should be discarded. Should the mold growth be severe, call on the services of a qualified professional.