

MAFES Dawg Tracks



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Treatment of Mold & Mildew



Molds are a natural part of our environment. They are important to the outdoors, as they serve as nature's vehicle in breaking down organic matter like fallen trees, limbs and leaves. But mold on the inside of homes and buildings should be avoided.

Molds reproduce tiny, invisible spores that float through the air, indoors and outdoors. These spores will land on wet surfaces and begin to grow. There are many types of mold and all must have moisture to grow. Molds are usually not a problem indoors, unless the spores land on a wet or damp spot and begin growing.

Molds have the potential to cause health problems with people. They produce allergens (substances that can cause allergic reactions), irritants, and in some cases potentially toxic substances (mycotoxins). Inhaling or touching mold spores can cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals. These reactions occur in the form of hay fever with symptoms such as, sneezing coughing, running nose, red eyes and skin rashes (dermatitis). They can be fairly common in some folks and can occur immediately or with a delayed reaction. Research on the health effects is ongoing. Some researchers defy that mold or mildew isn't too harmful and others disagree.

It is almost impossible to get rid of all mold indoors. The spores, as mentioned earlier, float around. As long as the environment is dry they are harmless, but let them find damp or moist areas and they begin to grow and spread. It is critical for all indoor environments to keep all areas as dry as possible by controlling the moisture. If you have a mold problem indoors, you have to fix the problem to rid the mold and/or mildew. However, you won't rid the area unless you correct the moisture problem first or the mold will reoccur.

On several occasions, personnel in county Extension offices attempted to paint over mold without first cleaning the surfaces. We gave them some advice on what to do, but in the essence of saving time and money, they short-circuited the plans. Each time they had to redo the job. It is critical to fix the water or moisture problem, clean the area with a commercial cleaning agent or household bleach, allow the area to dry for 24 to 48 hours and refinish afterwards. Failing to fix the moisture problem first only wastes time, material and money.

TIPS FOR PROTECTIVE WEAR WHEN CLEANING MOLD:

- Avoid breathing in mold or mold spores – You should purchase a N-95 respirator. These resemble a paper mask worn by painters, except they have a nozzle on the front. Some have a face gasket made of plastic

or rubber and have filters that can be changed after usage. Either type has to fit properly to protect you.

- Wear gloves – Long gloves that extend to the mid-arm are recommended. When working with detergent and water, short rubber or plastic gloves will suffice. If you are using bleach or other chemicals, a stronger glove will be required like nitrile, rubber or neoprene. Avoid touching the mold with bare hands.
- Wear goggles – Goggles without ventilation holes are recommended. Avoid getting mold in your eyes.

WHEN CLEANUP IS FINISHED:

- No visible mold or mold odors should be present.
- Follow-up should show no signs of water damage or mold growth.
- People should be able to reoccupy the area without health problems.

PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF MOISTURE & MOLD:

- When a water leak occurs indoors – **ACT QUICKLY**- if the spill or leak is repaired and the area cleaned and allowed to dry for 24 to 48 hours, in most cases the mold/mildew won't reappear.
- Clean and repair roof gutters regularly.
- Make sure that the ground slopes away from the building foundation so that water won't collect and stand at the foot of the foundation.
- Keep air conditioning drip pans clean and the drain lines unobstructed and flowing properly.
- Keep indoor humidity low. If possible, keep indoor humidity below 60 percent (ideally between 30 and 50 percent) relative humidity. Relative humidity can be measured with an instrument that costs between \$10 and \$50 and are available at many hardware stores.

TIPS TO HELP REDUCE HUMIDITY:

- Clothes dryers, stoves, and kerosene heaters all produce moisture and should be vented outside. All combustion appliances like kerosene heaters will produce water vapor and will increase the humidity unless they are vented outside.
- Use air conditioners and/or dehumidifiers when necessary.
- When showers are being used, run the vent fan or open a window. Also, when cooking or dishwashing use exhaust fans or open windows.

TIPS TO HELP PREVENT CONDENSATION:

- Reduce the humidity.
- Increase ventilation or air movement by opening doors and/or windows, when practical. Use fans as needed.
- Cover cold surfaces, such as water pipes, with insulation.
- Increase air temperature.

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Excerpts: www.epa.gov/mold

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THINK SAFETY
~ ~ACT SAFELY~ ~