

The Biggest Mistakes and Misunderstandings About Mold by Jaclyn Resnick

Many people find themselves dealing with potential mold problems. Unfortunately, this is a problem that most have not dealt with and the industry is completely unregulated. These are common mistakes people make...

Black Mold = Toxic Mold

The media has not done any favors by referring to Toxic mold as "The Black Mold". There are thousands of species of mold and many of them may appear black in color. They are not all toxic! The mold people are referring to is called Stachybotrys. Stachybotrys typically appears as a sooty black fungus occasionally accompanied by a thick mass of white mycelia. The presence of this fungus in buildings is significant because of the mold's ability to produce mycotoxins, which are extremely toxic, such as Satratoxin H. Exposure to these toxins can occur through inhalation, ingestion or dermal exposure. Symptoms include dermatitis, cough, rhinitis, nose bleeds, a burning sensation in the mouth and nasal passage, cold and flu symptoms, headache, general malaise, and fever. It gained such media attention due to its association with several infant deaths in Cleveland as well as the Ed McMahon case, Melinda Ballard case and the Manhattan Beach case of 2005.

The House is new... it Can't Have Mold

Many people believe that if the home is new (or remodeled), it can't have mold. Mold has nothing to do with the age of a home. Mold is a result of water damage. It can be from something as small as a slow drip to a major catastrophe. Mold can also be present on new construction materials. Many builders build with lumber that has been sitting on palettes in lumber yards. When the wood is exposed to moisture, humidity and rain, fungal growth can occur. The mold should be treated or removed prior to dry walling to avoid future problems.

I Know I Have Mold, I Don't Need to Test -- I am Just Going to Fix It

One of the **BIGGEST** mistakes people make is remediating mold without testing it first. When you can see what appears to be fungal growth, that very well may be an area that will require remediation, however, if you do not know the extent of the problem, you may set yourself up to be ripped off. A mold remediation company cannot determine the extent of the problem, nor can they determine if something has gone airborne by looking at it. In order to have a successful mold remediation, it is imperative to know where the mold starts and stops so you can contain the affected areas appropriately and remove the visible and microscopic airborne spores. If you do not contain the entire area of contamination, you may fix only a portion, leaving residual spores in your home for your family to ingest or for potential regrowth. The moment you pay a remediation company's final invoice and allow them to leave your home, they are off the hook.

If you have a recurrence due to mold that was never removed in the first place, the remediation company is not going to come back and fix it. Not only do remediation companies not come back, but it is next to impossible to find a remediation company that is willing to stand behind their work and guarantee that they will pass clearance testing or pay if they fail. Recent exposés on local news stations went so far as to show multiple remediation companies come into peoples homes and tell them on the spot that they had "Toxic Black Mold" and needed to get out immediately as well as requiring full remediation at great expense. There was no mold... it was merely black eye make-up. NOBODY can tell you if what they are looking at is mold without laboratory analysis.

I've Called My Insurance Company and They Will Handle It

Your insurance company does not want to "help you". Your insurance company wants to find any and every reason why they can negate your claim. Look at all the insurance companies under fire right now for canceling policies when people get sick! Most policies do not cover mold and if your policy does cover mold, it is probably capped at \$5,000.00 and covers sudden-loss occurrences only. You should always check your policy **before** contacting your insurance

company as they may find reason to cancel you. If you are covered, you are not required to use companies recommended by your insurance company. Many remediation companies do volume business at reduced rates with insurance companies. These companies may cut corners and do as little as possible to get you signed off... **BEWARE!!**

I'm Buying a House Which Has Been Remodeled(or is Brand New) So I Don't Need a Mold Inspection

Many people buy homes without inspecting for mold. Keep in mind that when people prepare a home for sale, they paint, clean carpets, light candles, bake cookies etc., which may mask the presence of any signs of past water damage, fungal growth or even musty odors etc. You may not be aware of hidden leaks behind walls or other conditions conducive to fungal growth. What you may not know can cost you a lot! When you move in, it's too late.

The most important key points when dealing with a potential mold issue are:

- Have your problem assessed by a reputable testing company.
- Don't expose any wall cavity that has had water damage without testing it first. You may cause a problem of cross-contamination.
- If you have water damage, get the water source turned off immediately and dry it out using dehumidifiers and radiant heat etc. Do not cut into walls, ceilings etc. and do not blow fans without proper containment.
- Do not use companies that are "one-stop shops" (testing, removal, re-build). That is considered a conflict of interest. You may get an unethical, unscrupulous company that will frighten you into more work than necessary, falsely pass clearance and do more destructive work than required to cause you more rebuild.
- Don't use companies that specialize in everything (Carpet Cleaning, Air Conditioning repair, Mold testing & removal and tow-truck service). You wouldn't allow your dentist to perform brain surgery and you wouldn't allow your own child to grade their SAT's... Don't trust your home or your family's health to just anyone. Do your homework!
- Research the company you are thinking of hiring. How long have they been in business? Do they have lawsuits pending? Have they been in trouble as another company and opened in a new name? Are they a franchise? (anyone can buy a franchise). Check with the Better Business Bureau, get personal references and protect yourself!

Jaclyn Resnick is the President of Mold USA, and may be reached at (310) 823-MOLD or by visiting www.moldusa.com.