

7 Reasons for Periodic Mold Inspections

By J. Mark Roach, CRMI, CMI

Oh...that dreaded call from your tenant, ...“I have a mold problem!” Anyone who owns or manages rental property has probably already experienced this phone call, or very likely will in the future.

Landlords across the nation are receiving bitter lessons in the realities of how costly and aggravating even a minor mold problem can be. It has become more obvious that a different approach is necessary to inoculate against such issues.

It is widely known that the courts are loaded with mold related lawsuits, and the numbers are increasing dramatically. In many cities, lawyers aggressively solicit tenant mold lawsuits in numerous ways. In Los Angeles you will see attorney ads targeting tenants on television, in newspapers, on the backs of buses and on bus stop benches with slogans like “Got Mold? Call Us!” - (usually in multiple languages).

Since the insurance industry eliminated mold coverage, the only solution that makes any sense is a self-insuring, proactive inspection program with periodic water intrusion and mold inspections by certified professionals.

Most conscientious landlords do bi-annual or annual “walk-through” inspections, checking smoke alarms, for water leaks and the general conditions of a unit. However, most who perform these inspections are neither certified nor equipped to accurately discover a water intrusion issue or true mold threat, and in the event of litigation will NOT make a qualified witness.

A “water intrusion” is herein defined as *any moisture from any source entering any area that should remain dry.*

As we know, mold problems start with a water intrusion. Whether from outside sources or interior sources, water intrusions are often a result of inadequate landlord or tenant maintenance. Poor tenant living conditions like overcrowding, poor ventilating practices, deferred housekeeping, and unreported problems can also be a primary cause.

One small leak, undetected or ignored, can cause enormous water damage and mold problems in a short period of time. Water can travel into other units, compounding damages and exposure to liability.

More and more, property management companies and multi-unit owners are contracting with professional certified mold inspection firms who have advanced technical knowledge and experience in these areas. Allowing un-certified personnel to perform these inspections may result in incomplete or inaccurate findings and an increase in liability accordingly.

These inspections involve more than a simple *walk-through*. The certified inspector examines the following typical areas and more, and in much more detail:

- Interior room; ceilings, walls, windows, doors and floors for any evidence of water intrusions or mold.
- All plumbing outlets; in kitchens, bathrooms, laundry rooms, wet bars or any area where water lines or drain lines exist.
- The condition of tub and shower enclosures, sinks, toilets and cabinets. Conditions of tile, tile grout, caulking etc.
- Examination of the exterior; poor landscaping, exterior walls for areas where water can enter, inadequate sub-floor ventilation, improper placement and direction of sprinklers, over-watering and more.
- Documentation and logging of lifestyle practices and living conditions of the tenant.

The inspections should include the use of electronic devices, such as moisture meters and thermal-imaging, to locate moisture not visible to the eye.

Though these inspections are not considered exhaustive in nature, they will reveal many problems *not* detected by traditional *walk-through* inspections.

7 Reasons for Periodic Water Intrusion And Mold Inspections

1. Dramatically reduces, and in many cases eliminates most water intrusion/mold problems which can result in extreme expense, liability, and aggravation.
2. Establishes a track record of due diligence, reducing many elements of potential liability.
3. Minimizes damages, reduces potential environmental health threats to tenants.
4. Reduces water damage/mold problems that can significantly reduce property values.
5. Observation and documentation of tenant living conditions and practices to evaluate and record the cause and responsible party for a water intrusion or mold problem.
6. The independent certified inspector acts as the consultant and representative serving the best interests of the landlord.
7. Provides inspection data supported by digital photos, documenting the ongoing time-line of events and activities serving as evidence against legal actions.

There is no magic solution to a water intrusion or mold problem. No matter how many inspections are done, leaks and water intrusions are still going to occur. The key is to minimize the damages and liability.

Having an advanced pro-active inspection plan with a qualified inspection firm serves as a last line of defense against the perils of mold, and drastically reduces damages and liabilities.

Unfortunately, only a few companies offer this specialized service, but more and more are cropping up. The inspector's expertise should not be limited to just mold inspection techniques, but must also be knowledgeable in analyzing the cause and cure for the water intrusion which caused the mold, otherwise the inspection has limited value. Mold inspectors with a home inspection or construction background are more likely to be better qualified.

The smarter companies that do specialize in this type of inspection have learned that wearing uniforms and driving marked vehicles with reference to "mold" can *create* a mold scare among tenants. Word spreads among tenants, often leading to a mini-epidemic of usually frivolous complaints which would have otherwise never have happened. Always ask!

Fees for this service vary based on the size of and number of units to be inspected, and on the activities to be performed. Typically, fees run from \$45-75 per unit, which includes the exterior. Any testing or sampling is extra.

For an average 10-unit building, \$450-750 per year is an inexpensive premium to pay for a self-insuring activity that can save unlimited headaches.

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