

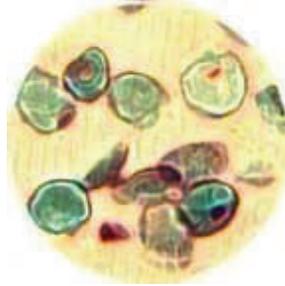
Loss Prevention News

Provided by the Texas Municipal League Intergovernmental Risk Pool

Indoor Air Quality: Molds, Fungi, Mildew and Moisture

Mold can become a concern for occupants of buildings and homes, but in reality mold is just a part of overall indoor air quality. Molds are present everywhere. For mold to occur on surfaces, the following conditions are ideal: temperature range above 40° and below 100°, mold spores, nutrient base (most surfaces contain nutrients), and moisture. There is no practical way to remove all mold and fungi from a building. Most common molds are not generally hazardous to individuals. Some people who have allergies, asthma, or weakened immune systems may experience allergy-like symptoms. Like any other indoor air quality issue, it is important to address the comfort of employees and occupants quickly through assessing and repairing the causes of the problem.

In buildings, molds can become a problem when there is excessive moisture. In the case of molds and fungi, removing the source of moisture – such as through repairs or dehumidification- is critical. If the building has had plumbing leaks, roof leaks, flooding, or a sewage backup, look for moisture that may provide conditions for mold, mildew and fungal growth. Make sure the leaks are repaired and the area is dried. Wet materials should be dried and cleaned within 24-48 hours. Absorbent materials such as ceiling tiles, drywall and carpet may have to be replaced.



Areas of mold should be cleaned up, replacing materials as necessary. The surface should be dried completely. Mold can be washed off hard surfaces with detergent and water. Areas of less than 25 square feet of mold can be remediated by the owner.

A standard for remediation often used is the New York City Department of Health Fungal Remediation protocols. If outside contractors are hired to clean up mold, check references and make sure the contractor is licensed by the Texas Department of State Health Services.

For long-term solutions to indoor air quality, Heating, Venting and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems should be evaluated. In the case of molds, indoor humidity should be reduced (to 30-60%) by venting moisture-generating sources to the outside, increasing ventilation, using exhaust fans, insulating to reduce the potential for condensation, or other methods. The factors that determine relative humidity are often misunderstood. A knowledgeable HVAC specialist can be a building owner's best source of information and will help keep the conditions in the building at an acceptable comfort level for the occupants.

Resources

There are many practical resources, but listed are a few that address indoor air quality.

Texas Department of State Health Services—Indoor Air Quality Program

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/iaq/default.shtm> The State's Indoor Air Quality Program works to identify problems and concerns related to the quality of air in occupied buildings, and to provide information to help prevent or remediate concerns. The agency also grants licenses to mold assessment and remediation personnel.

Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.gov/mold/index.html>
A starting point for EPA's resources.

Building Air Quality: A Guide for Building Owners and Facility Managers, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

www.epa.gov/iaq/largebldgs/baqtoc.html There is an appendix specifically on Moisture, Mold and Mildew, and entire document addresses common Indoor Air Quality problems and solutions.

Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings, EPA.

<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldremediation.html> This document provides recommendations on mold remediation. Its purpose is to help building managers and maintenance personnel evaluate an in-house remediation plan or a plan submitted by an outside contractor.