

SEPTEMBER IS MOLD AWARENESS MONTH

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With September being “National Indoor Toxic Mold Awareness Month”, I would like you to take a step back and evaluate the potential for mold growth in your home. Established by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the purpose of Mold Awareness Month is to educate homeowners about the negative financial and health-related effects of indoor molds and toxins.

The occurrence of mold growth can be disastrous. According to the Insurance Information Institute, water and mold damage cost insurers approximately \$2.5 billion annually. Mold can be prevented and treated by paying attention to the details of a home, in its design, construction and most importantly, its maintenance.

So, what are molds? Molds are microscopic organisms that belong to the fungi kingdom. Molds require two things to live, moisture and a food source. In nature, molds play a key role in the decomposition of leaves, wood, and other plant debris. Although helpful in nature, the presence of mold in the home can be extremely harmful to structural components, as well as home occupants.

So, why are molds harmful and make me sick? Many mold species produce mycotoxins. Mycotoxins are toxic vapors produced by mold spores when they sporulate, or grow, and have serious health effects on humans and animals. Mycotoxins are so poisonous that they have been used as a biological war weapon.

Stachybotrys chartarum is the most studied and well-known toxic mold. It is known to produce trichothecene mycotoxins. *Aspergillus* produces aflatoxin mycotoxins. Aflatoxins are among the most carcinogenic substances known. Both of these mold types are very commonly found in homes after a water damage event has occurred.

Mycotoxins enter the body through inhalation, ingestion, or contact with the skin, and can result in a multitude of symptoms including but not limited to: dermatitis, cough, rhinitis, nose bleeds, cold and flu-like symptoms, headache, general malaise and fever. Mycotoxin exposure can lead to toxic injury that may include multiple illnesses, affecting the skin and the nervous, vascular, respiratory, digestive, reproductive, urinary, and immune systems; including the formation of cancers and can be life-threatening.

Molds can even grow inside the body. Certain species of molds referred to as “body temperature molds” can live and grow inside the human body, causing recurring infections and numerous other health problems as well as death.

Can I use bleach to treat mold? NO! Bleach combined with certain mycotoxins and VOC’s (Volatile Organic Compounds), can create neurotoxins and brain tumors. OSHA does not recommend using bleach in mold remediation. Bleach will change the color of

the mold, but typically it will reappear in a short amount of time. It is important to follow safety guidelines when using cleaners to remove molds.

This task put into the hands of the inexperienced could turn out to be more harmful than just leaving the mold alone. The important thing to remember is that mold spores, whether dead or alive, can cause adverse health effects. Molds also produce a large number of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These chemicals are responsible for the musty odors produced by growing molds.

My simple recommendation if mold is found in your home is to contact a professional firm that deals with diagnosing and removing molds from homes. Mold is a danger to your health, and your asset, don't let it devastate you.