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- In the News -

Toxic Substances ...

[As the Mold Grows](#)

Will Texas impose an insurance cap on mold damages?

Will there be a new Erin Brockovich movie about toxic mold?

Will common sense take care of most indoor mold problems?

If you have a mold problem, who you gonna call?



Mike Miller, indoor air quality coordinator at EPA-Dallas, says thanks to recent publicity, mold is stirring up more questions than answers.

Mold is everywhere. Indoors and out. Some of it is good. Much of it isn't.

Mold is a fungus, a sponge-like organism, in the same family as yeast and mushrooms.

The Bad Kind

The mold in the real Erin Brockovich's new California home is not good. She's suing the builder.

The mold in a 22-room mansion in Dripping Springs, Texas, was not good. It caused health problems for the family living there and cost an insurance company \$32 million in court-ordered damages for mishandling a water leak claim.

Some insurance companies in Texas have stopped selling new homeowners policies because of concern over mold claims.

Miller says the public is concerned because mold is making news, and there are no standards and no laws to deal with it. California is considering the nation's first mold law, which would set standards there for acceptable levels indoors and require home sellers to disclose mold problems.

No certified mold experts exist. Anywhere.

EPA's Public Information Center in Dallas gets more calls about mold than any other environmental topic. Yet Miller says most callers receive basic, "common-sense" answers.

Molds and Health

Mold exposure indoors does not always present a health problem. But some people, including some children, are sensitive to mold and can suffer allergic reactions like nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, or wheezing. Some individuals with chronic respiratory diseases may experience difficulty breathing, may develop mold infections in their lungs, and should consult a doctor for diagnosis and treatment.

Key Topics

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- Laboratory
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- Waste
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Workers exposed to large amounts of mold, like farmers working around moldy hay, may suffer severe reactions, including fever and shortness of breath.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest sensitive people should avoid outdoor areas that are likely to have mold, such as compost piles, cut grass, and wooded areas.

Indoor Mold Basics

Molds produce tiny spores that float continuously through the air, indoors and out. When mold spores land on a damp spot indoors, they often begin to grow, particularly if the moisture problem is not corrected quickly. Molds can grow on wood, ceiling tiles, drywall, paper, carpet, and foods.

There is no practical way to eliminate all mold and mold spores indoors. The way to control indoor mold growth is to control moisture.

It's important to dry water damaged areas and items within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth. If mold is a problem in your home, you must clean up the mold and get rid of the excess water or moisture. Fix leaky plumbing or other sources of water.

Mold growth can be removed with commercial cleaning products or a weak bleach solution (one cup bleach in one gallon of water). Wear gloves during cleanup and be careful not to spread the mold. Sensitive people who have to clean up mold should wear a tight-fitting face mask.

Mold Prevention

To prevent mold from growing indoors:

- Keep the humidity level in the house low, below 40% if possible.
- Use an air conditioner or a de-humidifier during humid months.
- Be sure the home has adequate ventilation, including exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathrooms.
- Add mold inhibitors to paints before application.
- Clean bathrooms with mold killing products.
- Do not carpet bathrooms and basements.
- Remove or replace previously soaked carpets, ceiling tiles, upholstery, or other absorbent materials.

Stachybotrys

Though the greenish-black mold called *stachybotrys chartarum* has received lots of media attention, experts at the Centers for Disease Control stress that any mold growing in a home should be considered a potential problem and cleaned up. If the mold problem is extensive, money spent on testing probably would be better spent on having the mold cleaned up by professionals.

Molds are not new; they've always been with us. The way to prevent mold problems is to repair leaks and clean up the mold quickly.

In other words, in most moldy situations, common sense still works.

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