

Mold won't grow in Arizona, (and other dangerous falsehoods)

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The subject of mold has become of a topic of considerable uncertainty and discussion. The absence of definitive governmental advice and legislation has contributed to this situation. On the other hand, some facts have been clearly and scientifically established.

For example, mold and mildew are both fungi, a family of microorganisms that also includes mushrooms. (Advanced cases of mold infestation, in fact, can include mushroom growth on carpet and walls.) Mold species, perhaps 100,000 in number, are resilient and difficult to fight. They all reproduce asexually, need only moisture, air, and organic sustenance to survive, and will thrive even in the absence of sunlight.

There is no doubt that mold has become a severe financial burden for governments, schools, homeowners, builders, and the real estate industry in general. Costs of remediation and responding to lawsuits now are in the tens of billions of dollars annually.

Other issues, however, are still subject to conjecture and a slowly developing body of evidence. Consider the following myths:

Mold is not a problem in Arizona

Unfortunately, it is. Statistics developed by American Risk Management Resources rank Arizona sixth among the 50 states in insurance payments for mold problems.

Regardless of high outside air temperatures and low humidity, mold can start indoors as the result of any kind of water intrusion, then survive with the assistance of man-made humidity. Among the common sources of water are evaporative coolers, washer hookups, icemaker lines, sewer and drainpipe leaks, irrigation system intrusions, monsoon damage, and broken water pipes (common culprit – polybutylene pipe). Experts theorize that Arizona has such a severe problem because moisture is retained within the walls and windows of our buildings, which are tightly sealed and insulated against the consistently hot outside climate, producing condensation problems inside. Mold spores are always in the air, even in sealed structures, making an infestation at the juncture of water and organic building materials highly likely.

Mold doesn't cause illness

Almost anyone in the medical community will agree that the ingestion of mold spores can aggravate allergies and asthma and produce bronchial distress. In addition, recent research leans



Just because you don't see it doesn't mean it isn't there. While no mold is visible on the wall, removing the cabinets tells a different story.

toward the conclusion that mold, in and of itself, can be an original source of illness. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), for example, now recognizes that the mycotoxins produced by species of mold commonly found in residential and commercial buildings can contribute to skin/membrane irritation, immune system problems, allergic rhinitis, central nervous system damage, liver damage, and possibly cancer. While the research is not yet complete, it is clear that building owners would be wise to avoid the legal implications that often precede incontrovertible proof.

Bleach kills mold

This is a common misperception, nurtured by decades of bad advice offered by people and organizations who should know better. Actually, the chlorine in household bleach isn't concentrated enough to kill mold. In addition, the chlorine continues to evaporate through the plastic containers as they sit on the shelf, further weakening the concentration. Wisely, most marketers of household bleach no longer claim biocidal effects of their products on mold, and the EPA has steadily removed bleach from its lists of mold remedies. Examples abound of bleach masking the existence of mold by removing its color, while simultaneously feeding the colony by adding moisture. If chlorine is to be used to kill mold, it should be in the form of highly toxic chlorine dioxide gas, a product that most of us would be grateful to avoid altogether.

Only structural demolition can eradicate mold

The traditional methods of combating mold do indeed include removal and disposal of all affected materials, as well as a significant portion of surrounding, unaffected material. This process is time-consuming and expensive. Many remediation firms in Tucson provide these services. There is, however, now a better and less expensive way. New EPA-registered, nontoxic products can reduce the amount of material that must be removed and can protect the surrounding surfaces to the point that they are impervious to mold spores. Rather than attempting to kill the mold, the process allows the products to clean non-porous and porous surfaces, then traps the removed spores and organisms in highly effective particulate filters.

Mold cannot be prevented

Fortunately, it now can be minimized. By treating entire infected structures, or treating new structures as they are being built, the process can guarantee against the occurrence (or reoccurrence) of mold for periods of from two to five years, and the warranties are backed by the largest insurer in the US. The company can thus assume the entire liability of a building owner for that period, obviating the need to obtain increasingly expensive mold damage insurance.

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