

M O L D
NOTICE, DISCLOSURE and DISCLAIMER

What Homeowners Should Know about Mold

Mold: Lately, mold has been in the news. Mold is a type of fungus. It occurs naturally in the environment, and it is necessary for the natural decomposition of plant and other organic material. It spreads by means of microscopic spores borne on the wind, and is found everywhere life can be supported. Residential home construction is not, and cannot be designed to exclude mold spores. If the growing conditions are right, mold can grow in your home. Most homeowners are familiar with mold growth in the form of bread mold, and mold that may grow on bathroom tile.

In order to grow, mold requires a food source. This might be supplied by items found in the home, such as fabric, carpet or even wallpaper, or by building materials, such as drywall, wood and insulation, to name a few. Also, mold growth requires temperate climate. The best growth occurs at temperatures between 40° and 100° F. Finally, mold growth requires moisture. Moisture is the only mold growth factor that can be controlled in a residential setting. By minimizing moisture, a homeowner can reduce or eliminate mold growth.

Moisture in the home can have many causes. Spills, leaks, overflows, condensation, and high humidity are common sources of home moisture. Good housekeeping and home maintenance practices are essential in the effort to prevent or eliminate mold growth. If moisture is allowed to remain on the growth medium, mold can develop within 24 to 48 hours.

Consequences of Mold: All mold is not necessarily harmful, but certain strains of mold have been shown to have adverse health effects in susceptible persons. The most common effects are allergic reactions, including skin irritation, watery eyes, runny nose, coughing, sneezing, congestion, sore throat and headache. Individuals with suppressed immune systems may risk infections. Some experts contend that mold causes serious symptoms and diseases which may even be life threatening. However, experts disagree about the level of mold exposure that may cause health problems, and about the exact nature and extent of the health problems that may be caused by mold. The Center for Disease Control states that a link between the presence of toxic mold and serious health conditions has not been proven.

What the Homeowner can do: The homeowner can take positive steps to reduce or eliminate the occurrence of mold growth in the home, and thereby minimize any possible adverse effects that may be caused by mold. These steps include the following::

- Before bringing items into the home, check for signs of mold. Potted plants (roots and soil), furnishings, or stored clothing and bedding material, as well as other household goods, could already contain mold growth.
- Regular vacuuming and cleaning will help reduce mold levels. Mild bleach solutions and most tile cleaners are effective in eliminating or preventing mold growth.
- Keep the humidity in the home low. Vent clothes dryers to the outdoors. Ventilate kitchens and bathrooms by opening the windows, by using exhaust fans, or by running the air conditioning to remove excess moisture in the air, and to facilitate evaporation of water from wet surfaces.
- Promptly clean up spills, condensation and other sources of moisture. Thoroughly dry any wet surfaces or material. Do not let water pool or stand in your home. Promptly replace any materials that cannot be thoroughly dried, such as drywall or insulation.
- Inspect for leaks on a regular basis. Look for discolorations or wet spots. Repair any leaks promptly. Inspect condensation pans (refrigerators and air conditioners) for mold growth. Take notice of musty odors, and any visible signs of mold.
- Should mold develop, thoroughly clean the affected area with a mild solution of bleach. First, test to see if the affected material or surface is color safe. Porous materials, such as fabric, upholstery or carpet should be discarded. Should the mold growth be severe, call on the services of a qualified professional cleaner.

What to ask a contractor?

Most people take for granted the comfort provided by their central air conditioner, heat pump or furnace until something goes wrong and the unit needs to be serviced or replaced. When this happens it's important to contact a quality heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration (HVACR) contractor who is knowledgeable, skilled and qualified to do the job.

The HVACR industry is highly technical and can be frightening to those that know nothing about how the equipment works in their home. It's important that consumers are as educated about the product they are buying or having serviced. The first step is to understand what is required of the contractor that is being called required by the local jurisdiction, state, and industry.

To insure satisfaction the following are questions that should be asked of a prospective HVACR contractor:

Are you licensed?

Maryland, Virginia, and the District all require HVACR contractors to be licensed. Don't just take their verbal word ask to see a copy of the license (at the minimum ask for the license number).

Are your technicians CFC certified?

Any technician working with refrigerant needs to have a certification mandated by EPA showing that he is trained and certified in the proper techniques for recovering, recycling, reclaiming and disposing of used refrigerant ask to see a copy of the certification card (it needs to say an EPA approved program).

Do you carry the proper business and workmen compensation insurance required to do the work?

If they are licensed in the State they should already satisfy this question.

Are you going to give me your quote in writing (on a printed form not scratched out on a piece of plan paper)?

This should outline what the contractor's, as well as the consumer's, responsibilities are.

Do you have the desire and ability to perform warranty service throughout the warranty period?

Some contractors only install they won't service the equipment.

Don't consider price only.

Be sure that you are comparing "apples to apples" when considering more than one contractor.

Be sure they are quoting you on the same size unit and offering the same service.

Will you please provide references?

Find out if other customers are satisfied.

When the HVACR contractor arrives:

- Does the contractor/ technician have proper identification?
- Are they in a clearly identified company vehicle?
- Is the technician clean?
- Do they respect the consumers property?