

On the Home Front

Bi-monthly column by: Linda Skolnick

Keeping Mold at Bay Protects You and Your Home

Are you sick of hearing about mold? Unfortunately, it's only just begun! As a homeowner is this something you should be concerned about? What about as a homebuyer? The answer is yes and yes!

Mold, which can be found virtually everywhere in the home, from bathrooms, carpeting, plants, and food, is formed when there is a combination of moisture and organic matter to feed upon, such as leaves, wood, paper, plants or dirt.

In most cases mold is harmless, such as the small amount you may see in between your shower tiles, which can be easily cleaned up. However, it's when there is extensive contamination that you should be concerned, because it can cause problems to your health and property. Airborne mold spores can cause allergic reactions such as respiratory problems, nasal and sinus congestion, sore throat, reddened and burning eyes, and aches and pains. And if it gets into the walls, floors or roof, it can cause structural damage to your home that may be costly to repair.

So, how do you detect mold? The most common ways to detect growth is by sight and smell. You may smell a musty odor or see visible mold growth with discoloration ranging from white to orange and from green to brown or black. In addition there may be discoloration of building materials in areas where previous water damage occurred or rotting material.

But mold can also flourish in areas where there are no visible signs of mold or musty odors. There are some red flags that alert you that there may be a problem. (These are extremely important if you are a homebuyer)

- Stains or signs of leaks indoors
- Mold on landscaping bordering the home
- Water damage or seeping in basements (standing water breeds fungi and bacteria).
- Stains on carpet, especially over concrete floors

So... what to do if you find mold? If you are a homebuyer, you may want to consider getting an inspection if there is a strong indication that the mold problem is severe. This can save you from expensive repairs if you decide to purchase the home. If the mold is in your home, you first want to control the source of moisture. The Environmental Protection Agency makes these suggestions:

- Fix leaks and seepage.
- Put a plastic cover over dirt in crawlspaces to prevent moisture to the outside. Be sure crawlspaces are well ventilated.
- Use exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchen to remove moisture to the outside.

- Vent your clothes dryer to the outside.
- Use dehumidifiers and air conditioners, especially in hot, humid climates
- Pay special attention to carpet on concrete floors. Carpet can absorb moisture and serve as a place for mold to grow.
- Maintain and clean all appliances that come in contact with water. Mold can develop in standing water often making improperly maintained humidifiers or condensation trays particularly dangerous.

Then begins the clean up. If the mold is less than 2 or 3 square feet, it can be cleaned without professional help. Health House, a national education program created by the American Lung Association of Minnesota, recommends washing the area with soap and water first. Then disinfect the surface using a solution of 10 percent household bleach and 90 percent water (about 1 ½-cups bleach per gallon of water). Add a little detergent to help with the dirt and oil. Let the cleaned areas dry overnight. Remove, bag and discard any materials affected by the mold. You should also wear rubber gloves and a mask or respirator to protect you from breathing airborne spores.

Mold is a topic that is here to stay.....so take care of problems now for your family and for your investment.

For more information on mold and how to detect and treat it, you may want to visit the following web sites: Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov) and The Health House (www.healthhouse.org).