

Mold: Part One

There's Something Rotten in the State of My Basement

We've all been there, right?

Open the pantry, untie the bread bag, drop a slice on the counter, slather liberally with Nutella, commence to munch, and then *upon closer observation*, realize that the treasured white slice isn't really white *per se* but various shades of green and gray.

Suppressing the urge to vomit, we begin to wonder what fatal fungi we just consumed.

Now that's not *really* the mold to which we're referring, but we're infatuated with visceral imagery *and* Nutella, so we use both techniques whenever possible.



The mold to which we *are* referring is the creepy stuff that lurks and grows and generally hangs out in basements and other wet places. *That* mold is a minute plant-like growth that manifests on damp or decaying organic matter or on living organisms by any of a number of fungi.

Some Mold Is Old, Some Mold is Good, Some Mold is Bad

Mold has been part of nature's fabric since the beginning of creation and primarily exists to break down organic matter in our environment.

Some mold species are beneficial and give us products such as yummy cheese, delicious wine and life-saving medications – hooray for good mold!

Sadly, other molds can be harmful, especially when concentrated in a building's enclosed environment – boo hiss for bad mold.

Unwanted molds in property are generally referred to as *toxigenic molds*, which thrive on warm, wet conditions commonly caused by water intrusion into the building and/or exacerbated by poor ventilation.

Some of the more common toxigenic molds that reside and thrive indoors sound like they've been derived from a list of Greek mythology: Cladosporium, Penicillium, Alternaria, Aspergillus and Stachybotrys.

Sources of moisture include leaking roofs, flashings, siding, windows, and plumbing, as well as leaking foundations.

Mold By Any Other Name Would Be Just as Sweet (Not!)

Like any plant, mold can thrive as long as it has three inputs: food, moisture, and warm temperatures (which provide favorable conditions for growth). When these conditions are present, mold will grow and spread very quickly.

But the mold *plant* itself isn't the real issue.

The problem occurs when the mold plant releases spores which carry what are known as mycotoxins – think Alien. Spores are the dormant reproductive agents released by molds. Spores are *everywhere* and are dormant only until proper conditions have been established to encourage new growth.

Unfortunately, “proper conditions” are achieved when spores make contact with a building's occupants – you. Mycotoxins can be ingested via nose, mouth, eyes, and even via skin pores.



Whereto Our Health Is Bound, We Are Not Ourselves

Mold in the basement is bad. Mold in other wet spots is bad. Mold in your nose? Very bad.

Common health problems associated with molds include respiratory and gastrointestinal infections, skin rashes, muscle pain, memory loss; in some very extreme cases, the effects of mold may result in death.

Negative health effects depend on the type of mold, level of exposure, and susceptibility of the occupant, which varies from person to person. The most susceptible individuals are children, elderly and people with compromised immune systems.

All Is Not Lost – Testing For Infernal Mold



For relocation purposes, testing is conducted when the possibility of mold is visible and noted by a home inspector or disclosed by a homeowner, appraiser or real estate agent.

The first step in assessing a possible mold problem is to conduct a screening test, performed to determine the types of mold present and their concentration in the home; a testing regimen that includes collection of physical *and* airborne samples is the most accurate way to determine the types of molds actively growing, as well as the types of spores that have become airborne. All testing must be performed by trained, qualified indoor air quality specialists. Collected samples must be sent to a certified laboratory to ensure sample quality, proper analysis, and interpretation of results.

Recommended test regimen

- Visual analysis – Review of the interior of the home to document all visible mold and possible moisture sources
- Swab or tape lift samples – Physical collection of visible surface mold
- Airborne samples of property’s exterior – Collection of mold spores retrieved around exterior of the building in order to establish baseline/control samples
- Airborne samples of property’s interior – Collection of mold spores from ambient air with the use of an active air pump and collection filter
- Sample packaging – Carefully packaged and labeled for delivery to lab and to maintain a proper “chain of custody” that links samples to subject property

It is important to understand that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has *not* established any acceptable or recommended action level for mold exposure. Although some industry groups have attempted to establish such guidelines, none have been adopted as “official” and US Inspect believes that the best way to weigh all the variables is to commission a professional environmental specialist to perform an evaluation of the property and deliver a professional assessment.



It Is Not In The Stars to Hold our Destiny – Evaluating Test Results

After testing has been completed and mold levels have been documented by a laboratory, results are delivered to an Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) specialist for interpretation and production of a final report.

US Inspect reports are delivered according to the following structure:

- General property information
- Method of sampling used
- Findings of the site visit
- Discussion that advises the user about the findings
- Conclusion which states whether remediation is recommended
- Remediation procedures which outline basic steps that should be taken as part of the remediation

US Inspect reports do *not* provide *detailed* remediation procedures; detailed remediation techniques are provided only upon request and at additional cost, based on the IAQ specialist’s time and effort. Texas is an exception to standard practice; Texas state law requires inclusion of detailed remediation procedures.

The Unfolding Mystery: Mold Remediation

Bet you didn't see this coming, did you? This is a cliff-hanger!

Mold: The Sequel (Remediation) is next month's topic, so please stay tuned.

However, if you just can't stand to wait and require immediate assistance with a mold challenge, US Inspect's relocation client management professionals can help guide you to proper remediation.

In the meantime, if you or your clients have any questions about mold or *any* inspection type, US Inspect is available to guide and assist you.

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About Us Inspect

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US Inspect is the nation's leading inspection services firm, delivering residential and corporate relocation inspections since 1987. Our reputation is built on decades of honesty, integrity and excellent service to our customers at one of the most important decisions in their lives – buying or selling a home. We are committed to ensuring that each of our customers enjoys an exceptional inspection experience.

Please contact marketing@usinspect.com if you have any questions or require assistance.