

**W**hat is the M-word? Most people reply, mold. Understandable considering mold is a common concern in the housing industry. Most folks don't like to hear this, but the reality is that mold is everywhere, and unless you're wearing a mask, you are breathing in mold as you read this article.

Mold plays a vital part in organic decomposition and is used for many medicinal purposes – from breaking down dead trees and leaves to the production of penicillin – and there are thousands of known species of mold in our surrounding environment. Thus, the concept of a mold-free home is unrealistic.

Mold can continue to be a problem, even after cleaning, if the moisture source is not addressed. That's the key: mold cannot thrive without moisture. From that perspective, if you think you have a mold problem, what you actually have is a moisture problem.

Moisture is the M-word that should be focused on.

To better understand why moisture is the main concern, consider mold as a simple plant. As with most plants, molds tend to prefer a specific food source and environment. Once the plant seed/mold spore has found a new home, all it needs is water. Without moisture, a seed/spore will not be able to establish itself, grow and propagate, spreading its microscopic toxic spores to affect the health of susceptible humans.

Let's say your clients are concerned

about mold and want to have a mold test conducted. Typical mold testing consists of collecting the mold spores in one of several different ways – swabs, wipes, petri dish collection or air sampling. The spores can then be counted and identified through a laboratory evaluation. Because mold is everywhere – in floor drains, shower wall joints, HVAC filters, duct work, walls, windows with condensation, and your teenagers closet, etc. – and because sampling is generally conducted in uncontrolled open settings, very few collection samples come back without concerning quantities of mold species.

So the mold test came back indicating mold is present. Now what? Most people don't realize that simply identifying the species and quantity of the mold does not address where it is coming from. If you don't know where it's growing, how can you get rid of it?

None of the collection methods, with the exception of swabbing a visual mold colony, address where the active mold is growing. The key to finding a mold colony is finding the source of moisture that is allowing it to thrive. A home of any age, design or condition can have an active moisture problem. A moisture inspection will identify the origin of the moisture. Where moisture is detected, we assume that the worst kind of mold could exist in that area, rendering mold testing unnecessary. Find the moisture and you'll find the mold.

Now, to clarify, a mold problem is not something to be trivialized. Mold can

dramatically affect the health of those with respiratory ailments or compromised immune systems, the young, the elderly and even the occasional hypochondriac. But because mold affects everyone differently – some people are hypersensitive while others are not affected at all – there are no established acceptable levels for mold. Additionally, noting that not all molds are irritants, it is impossible to say how much is too much. All we know for certain is that less is more when it comes to mold.

So how do we mitigate the mold? Once moisture has been sourced, proper repairs can be made to stop the moisture and to clean or replace all affected materials. Remember, without the moisture, the mold spores that are inevitably circulating through our homes will not be able to thrive. After all the repairs and cleanup have been completed, a moisture re-inspection of the area can prove it to be dry and unlikely to have future issues if appropriately maintained.

This moisture-driven process will avoid repetitive attempts at mold cleanup, which can be very costly and time consuming. Once a mold stigma is attached to a property, it can be very difficult to rectify. Simply put, focusing on the moisture can restore a home to healthy conditions, limit collateral damage in a sale situation, and help keep more of the important M-word – money – in your pocket where it belongs.

In order to keep the legal beagles at bay, if a person's health is severely affected by mold, mold testing may be necessary to identify the species and to establish baselines before and after repairs are made.



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