

**Subject:** Controlling molds in the workplace

To All:

FYI - From JJ Keller at [www.jjkeller.com/ideaoftheweek/idea2076.htm?action\\_code=20577](http://www.jjkeller.com/ideaoftheweek/idea2076.htm?action_code=20577)

## **Controlling molds in the workplace**

Although molds play an important role in the natural environment, they can cause a variety of health effects and symptoms in people, such as asthma attacks, as well as the irritation of the eyes, skin, nose, and throat.

Currently, there are no federal standards or recommendations, (e.g., OSHA, NIOSH, EPA) for airborne concentrations of mold or mold spores. However, research on the relationship between mold exposures and health effects is ongoing.

Besides the potential health concerns associated with molds, employers should also be aware of the effects molds can have on the structural integrity of a building. If left unchecked, mold can eventually cause structural damage to a wood-framed building, weakening floors and walls as it feeds on moist wooden structural members.

It is important to understand that molds can grow on virtually any substance, as long as moisture or water, oxygen, and an organic source are present. They reproduce by creating tiny spores (viable seeds), which continually float through the indoor and outdoor air. Molds are usually not a problem unless mold spores land on a damp spot and begin growing. There are molds that grow on wood, paper, carpet, foods, and insulation, while other molds feast on the everyday dust and dirt that gather in the moist regions of a building.

The key to mold control is moisture control. When water leaks or spills occur indoors — act promptly. Any initial water infiltration should be stopped and cleaned promptly. A prompt response (within 24-48 hours) and thorough clean-up, drying, and/or removal of water-damaged materials will prevent or limit mold growth.

## **Mold prevention tips**

- Repair plumbing leaks and leaks in the building structure as soon as possible.
- Look for condensation and wet spots. Fix source(s) of moisture incursion problem(s) as soon as possible.
- Prevent moisture from condensing by increasing surface temperature or reducing the moisture level in the air (humidity). To increase surface temperature, insulate or increase air circulation. To reduce the moisture level in the air, repair leaks, increase ventilation (if outside air is cold and dry), or dehumidify (if outdoor air is warm and humid).

- Keep HVAC drip pans clean, flowing properly, and unobstructed.
- Perform regularly scheduled building/ HVAC inspections and maintenance, including filter changes.
- Maintain indoor relative humidity below 70% (25 - 60%, if possible).
- Vent moisture-generating appliances, such as dryers, to the outside where possible.
- Vent kitchens (cooking areas) and bathrooms according to local code requirements.
- Clean and dry wet or damp spots as soon as possible, but no more than 48 hours after discovery.
- Provide adequate drainage around buildings and slope the ground away from building foundations. Follow all local building codes.
- Pinpoint areas where leaks have occurred, identify the causes, and take preventive action to ensure that they do not reoccur.

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