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Mold Can Damage Home and Health

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Houston, TX, June 28, 2001 -- Mold has emerged as a by-product of Tropical Storm Allison. Mold can cause problems for your home as well as your health. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Division of Emergency Management (DEM), Texas Department of Public Safety, want you to safely remove the mold in your home and be aware of potential health risks, especially to those who are mold-sensitive.

Checking for mold

You can tell if you have mold in your home if you can see it, or if there is an earthy or musty odor. Visible mold growth can be found under water-damaged surfaces, or behind walls. Look for discoloration and cracking walls.

You should be concerned about mold in your home if the contamination is extensive. Mold can also cause structural damage to your home. Similarly, when wood becomes soaked it can warp when it dries and cause walls to crack or become weaker.

Mold can become a problem in your home if there is enough moisture to allow mold to thrive and multiply. Dampness, as a result of the flooding, can get in walls, carpets, and wood. This moisture provides an excellent environment for mold to multiply. Mold is especially attracted to paper products such as wallboard used in many homes.

Mold and your health

According to The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), mold growth in water-damaged homes can create a potential health hazard for individuals sensitive to mold.

There is always a little mold everywhere - in the air and on many surfaces. According to the CDC, there are very few cases of toxic mold reported. Mold exposure doesn't always present a health problem; but for those who are sensitive, mold spores can bring on allergic symptoms such as:

- Respiratory problems, such as wheezing, and difficulty in breathing
- Nasal and sinus congestion
- Burning and watering eyes
- Dry, hacking cough
- Sore throat
- Nose and throat irritation
- Shortness of breath
- Skin irritation

The best rule of thumb is to seek medical attention if you experience any of the above symptoms.

Treating mold in your home

Before beginning work on a flooded home, make sure the electricity is turned off. Wear a dust mask and gloves while cleaning and follow these cleaning steps:

- Remove any water and mud from the home
- Scrub all moldy surfaces with a non-ammonia soap or detergent, then rinse
- Disinfect with a diluted bleach solution, a mix of one to two cups of bleach per gallon of water
- Use a wet-dry vacuum to collect the excess bleach solution - do not rinse off the bleach solution
- Allow the treated surfaces to dry naturally and use fans or air conditioning to speed up the drying process

You can reduce the incidence of mold growth by reducing the humidity, lowering the temperature of your home, and ventilating bath and cooking areas. Also, avoid installing carpet in kitchens and baths.

If mold odors persist, continue to dry out the area and search for any hidden areas of mold. If any area continues to smell musty, you may have to repeat the cleaning process.

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Federal Emergency Management Agency