

# GLOBAL INDOOR HEALTH NETWORK

WORKING TOGETHER FOR HEALTHY INDOOR ENVIRONMENTS  
IN OUR HOMES, SCHOOLS AND BUSINESSES



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## Home, Not-So-Sweet Home on Military Bases

Congressional watchdogs at the Government Accountability Office have looked into multiple cases of illness and severely subpar housing on bases for all of the country's armed services. And they have given the military a flunking grade on the way many servicemen and women have been housed.

Go to page 12 to learn more.

## Lockdown has Lifted and Everything is Covered in Mould

*After the journalist took a road trip to North Carolina:*  
The area had just experienced an extremely wet and rainy spring, and the Airbnb I was staying in had been unoccupied since Covid-19 halted almost all travel in March.

When I unlocked the door, a putrid smell hit my nose immediately, like a wet beach towel left too long in a hot car. I was now sharing my rental house with some sort of mould.

**The pandemic has forced all sorts of buildings to sit empty for long periods of time. As people venture back into their homes, schools, and offices again, they may also find an unwelcome surprise inside.**

**The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns people who are reopening buildings to watch out for potential hazards like mould and Legionella pneumophila, the bacterium that causes Legionnaires' disease.**

Greg Bukowski, CEO of the mould inspection and removal firm Moldman USA, says he's seen an uptick in customers in the Chicago and St. Louis areas where his company is based.

"Homes that have been unoccupied for months have a high likelihood of having water-intrusion issues and subsequent mould issues," he says.

Water intrusion can come from something like a roof or plumbing leak or high humidity as a result of leaving the air conditioning off. This is not a new phenomenon, of course. Vacation homes and foreclosed properties often harbour mould.

...continued on page 2

See *Lockdown—everything covered in mould* on page 2

## Lockdown has Lifted and Everything is Covered in Mould (continued)

Continued from page 1...

New construction techniques may be somewhat to blame: Because homes are now tightly sealed for energy conservation, they may be poorly ventilated and susceptible to issues like mould.

Every year, some unlucky school districts return in August or September to find classrooms full of the stuff, says Jason Earle, the founder and CEO of 1-800-GOT-MOLD?, a mould inspection and removal firm based in the New York City area.

Oftentimes, he says, maintenance staff shampoo the carpets at the end of the school year and then turn air conditioning units off to save on utility costs, inadvertently creating a perfect environment for mould to thrive.

**Fungi need moisture and food to grow. They will eat almost any organic substance, from cardboard and wood to ceiling tiles and upholstery. What I inhaled were the airborne byproducts of its metabolic processes, or what the US Environmental Protection Agency says are “microbial volatile organic compounds.”**

Aside from producing a nasty smell, exposure to mould can also cause unpleasant side effects for people who are sensitive to it, like stuffy nose, coughing, and sore throat.

If you're immunocompromised, you may be more vulnerable to these and other symptoms, says Naresh Magan, a professor of applied mycology at Cranfield University in England.

For parents, the most serious issue to be concerned about is childhood asthma: A number of studies have found a link between mould exposure and the condition.

The world is really just a gigantic terrarium full of microscopic creatures ready to be inhaled. But if the concentration of mould spores in the air becomes too high, like inside a mould-contaminated building, it can cause an adverse health reaction.

Cleaning up mould is just one of many challenges communities are facing as they begin reopening offices and schools in the middle of a pandemic. More than half of US public schools are in need of repairs, according to a GAO report released in June. The most commonly needed fixes are to heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems – the very infrastructure necessary for stopping mould.

## Lockdown has Lifted and Everything is Covered in Mould (continued)

If you smell that signature musty scent but don't know where the mould is hiding, a regular flashlight can be your best friend. Check typically empty areas, like attics, crawl spaces, and basements. Even if the mould itself is not visible, you may see signs of its presence, like blistering paint, loose wall trim, staining, or discolouration around windows.

To prevent the fungi from taking root in the first place, you should keep your home heated or cooled to temperatures comfortable for humans, even if you don't plan to be there. “This is something we warn people about all the time: Buildings need to be lived in or maintained as such,” he says.

**But the most important thing is to control the level of moisture. The CDC recommends keeping humidity levels as low as possible, ideally below 50 percent. If you're planning an extended absence, you can invest in a smart thermostat capable of delivering moisture readings, or simply have a friend or family member drop by once in a while to check on things.**

Cleaning up mould is just one of many challenges communities are facing as they begin reopening offices and schools in the middle of a pandemic. More than half of US public schools are in need of repairs, according to a Government Accountability Office report released in June. The most commonly needed fixes are to heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems – the very infrastructure necessary for stopping mould.

Click [here](#) to read the article.

See *Mold at Somerset Middle School* on page 3

## Extremely High Levels of Mold Discovered at Somerset Middle School

Two areas at the Somerset Middle School have tested positive for “extremely high levels” of mold, and work to remedy the situation began Tuesday morning.

As part of preparing for the 2020-2021 school year amid COVID-19 fears, the town’s three elementary schools, its middle school and Somerset Berkley Regional High School in August had their indoor air quality tested and evaluated by MAC Services, LLC of Rochester.

The results were received late last week, with the library and Room 47 showing the extremely high levels. The library is located in the school’s original building (approximately 60 years old).

Room 47 is in the slightly newer sixth grade wing. Its extremely high report was “really a surprise,” SBR and Somerset Superintendent of Schools Jeffrey Schoonover said.

Schoonover said those two middle school locations were the only areas of serious concern in all of the school buildings. He said he does not know if the middle school cleanup could affect the opening of the formal middle school hybrid start to school scheduled for Sept. 28.

Three Special Education classes, scheduled to start their school year next Monday at the middle school, will be held at the Chace Street School temporarily, he said.

Schoonover said middle school teachers have been asked to work remotely.

Each school will also have its HVAC system assessed, Schoonover said.

The strongly suspected mold culprit in the middle school library, Schoonover said, is ceiling tiles. He said the tiles are being replaced and the tile-holding frames scrubbed clean.

Click [here](#) to read the article.

“They up and left and abandoned the job, and they never came back to it, so they never sealed it, never covered it, never came back to check on it ... the building was left to rot from the outside in and just (got) saturated with water for six months,” the parent said.

## Parents at PS 42 Vent Frustrations After Mold Discovered in School

Construction began on the building’s masonry early this year, but the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak stunted the work and left the building exposed, parents claim.

“They up and left and abandoned the job, and they never came back to it, so they never sealed it, never covered it, never came back to check on it ... the building was left to rot from the outside in and just (got) saturated with water for six months,” the parent said.

The Department of Education (DOE) confirmed that the exterior masonry work was scheduled to be done in the spring before being put on hold. Mold caused by leaks was then discovered in the school this summer.

While the second-grade parent did not witness the conditions herself, she said teachers informed her that mold was present on the tables and chairs — making the classrooms “uninhabitable.”

**Issues of water damage are not new at the PS 42 Annex building, Department of Buildings (DOB) records show. There are 17 open Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings/Environment Control Board violations for the PS 42 annex building dating back to 2011.**

**The violations note “water penetration through foundation” that leads to a gas meter and electrical room and other issues, such as “standing water” being observed at the time of inspection. The most recent water violation, issued on Aug. 30, 2019, said there was “water penetrating through walls, causing peeling and spalling at various locations.”**

Click [here](#) to read the article.

## MacDill Hires Resident Advocate to Address Mold, Other Family Housing Problems

Families living on MacDill Air Force Base have a new place to turn when maintenance and safety issues arise in their homes. Yet some residents, past and present, say more work remains to gain their trust that problems will be solved.

Last year, at least eight families living on base reported mold and other problems in their homes. Five families filed a lawsuit against property owners and managers for what they said were years of negligence. The litigation is ongoing. All of MacDill's family housing is owned and managed by private companies.

In May, officials appointed William Farnand as the new resident advocate, part of the installation's response to such concerns. The Air Force civilian employee reports to the 6th Air Refueling Wing vice commander and serves as an additional point of contact for residents in need.

Specifically, Farnand said, if a resident has worked with their landlord, a senior official with the property owner and the military housing office and hasn't resolved a housing problem, he gets involved. He can reach out directly to agencies across the base to help find a solution.

If they haven't already contacted their landlord, Farnand helps residents get a work order in and go through the process. He plans to host Zoom meetings next week to introduce himself to family members on base.

"Our goal is to provide a safe and healthy house for our tenants," Farnand said.

Base leaders also have hosted town hall meetings and legal workshops to advise residents of their rights, and created a Resident Voice Council, said Col. Benjamin Jonsson, commander of the 6th Air Refueling Wing.

Resident Valerie Ryan said this week that having yet another point of contact in the housing repair process may not help.

Last year, at least eight families living on MacDill Air Force Base reported mold and other problems in their homes. Five families filed a lawsuit against property owners and managers for what they said were years of negligence.



"Either the government's on our side or they're not, and it's very clear that they're not," she said.

## MacDill Hires Resident Advocate to Address Mold, Other Family Housing Problems (continued)

Ryan, whose Air Force husband is on a one-year tour overseas, moved into MacDill housing in April. By June, she said, she started noticing her living room floor getting wetter each day. She said she saw mold under the house and believed she needed a new air conditioning unit.

By mid-August, repairs were done, but she wasn't happy with the result and said she felt disrespected by representatives of the property owner and the military housing office.

**"Either the government's on our side or they're not, and it's very clear that they're not," she said.**

The number of work orders at MacDill dealing with mold has gone down this year compared to last, Hansen said, but he could not provide exact numbers. A lot of the frustration among families who dealt with mold in the past had to do with feeling like they weren't being heard, Hansen said.

But (this) comes too late for Traci Lenz, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit filed last year.

"We are thankful to see a continued effort to improve the process for those who continue to be affected by the conditions of their homes on MacDill," Lenz said in a text. "Unfortunately, these measures were not in place when we were forced to leave our home in early 2019."

Click [here](#) to read the article.

See *Mold in your car during the pandemic* on page 5



## Finding Mold in Your Car During the Pandemic? You Aren't Alone

Metro Atlanta drivers are opening car doors to find a car full of mold.

David Lonadier, owner of Lonadier's Mobile Detailing, told Channel 2 that this year, he's seeing three times the number of mold cases than in past years.

Marietta resident JT Shy was one of them. A stay in the hospital this spring left his truck sitting for weeks. When he came back, the inside was covered in mold.

"It was green and gray. And there were some spots in the back where it was black up in the cupholder area, had 2 car seats in there and they were covered in mold," he said.

Lonadier blamed Georgia's humidity and the pandemic's impact on travel.

**"It's because people aren't driving their vehicles. They're sitting closed up in humid situations with high heat, and that's kind of what mold needs."**

In late March, the Georgia Department of Transportation reported a sharp drop in traffic-- as much as a 50 percent reduction in some parts of the metro area.

Traffic has picked up since then, but many are still driving less often than we did before the pandemic.

Sandy Springs resident Jason Vinson's car sat idle for weeks after his employer sent workers home in March. He later found that his backseat was covered in mold.

**"When the humidity is above 90 degrees, which is pretty common in Atlanta, and the temperature is only 80 degrees, mold can start growing in three days," explained Lonadier.**

Out of the four Southeastern cities Lonadier operates in, he told Channel 2 that he's getting a particularly high number of mold cases.



## Finding Mold in Your Car During the Pandemic? You Aren't Alone (continued)

He pointed to Atlanta's trees as the possible culprit.

"People that live inside the perimeter especially, a lot of those folks don't have garages, they have to park on the street under trees," he said. "They just don't have any sun exposure; they don't ever get a chance to dry out."

Tree sap and other debris can also clog liftgate gutters, sunroof drain tubes, or in Vinson's case, the rubber seal of his trunk, allowing water to leak inside the car.

"In that well where the spare tire is was about four or five inches of water," he said.

**Lonadier told Channel 2 that the best way to prevent your car from growing moldy is to drive your car a few times every week. Run the air conditioning or roll the windows down-- the key is to circulate air.**

Check for leaks and spills, especially on carpet padding, to ensure that your car is staying dry.

"If you do that, you have a high probability of avoiding mold."

Click [here](#) to read the article.

## Mold Found in Cabell Hall as Students Return to College of William & Mary

Students moving into residence rooms in Cabell Hall at the College of William & Mary last week found another potential health problem facing them in addition to COVID-19: mold and mildew.

**The mold and mildew were so contaminating that college officials decided on Saturday morning, the day after a wave of students returned, to shut down the hall, a part of the Randolph Complex near the dining facility. All 41 Cabell students were moved elsewhere.**

New rooms available to them included the off-campus Ludwell Apartments off Jamestown Road, and the Lettie Pate Whitehead Evans Graduate Complex, adjacent to the law school on South Henry Street about four blocks from the main campus. The Evans apartments were up-scale from Cabell, some students said.

**Some other rooms in dorms across campus had reported mold “but we typically do. ... Unfortunately, moisture and mold are a regular issue in our area due in great part to the high level of humidity and prevalent warm temperatures,” explained Suzanne Clavet, director of news and media, W&M communications office. She acknowledged a number of random rooms affected in Old Dominion Hall and students were moved to other rooms within the same building.**

Specifically regarding Cabell Hall, Clavet confirmed that there was “an AC malfunction.”

“Facilities Management has been working to address the humidity issue (discovered in August) in consultation with the Environmental, Health and Safety Office,” she said. “As the building was checked, EH&S staff did find additional issues that were addressed or cleaned as needed.”

Parents of the displaced students, however, questioned how much earlier cleaning was done since mold and mildew were still present when the students moved back in last weekend. They expressed concern at the way W&M officials handled the mold and mildew situation if the school already knew potential problems existed when the first students returned.

Students moving into residence rooms in Cabell Hall at the College of William & Mary last week found another potential health problem facing them in addition to COVID-19: mold and mildew.

The mold and mildew were so contaminating that college officials decided to shut down the hall.

## Mold Found in Cabell Hall as Students Return to William & Mary University (cont'd)

**“William & Mary has a prime objective: take care of our children. Everything else, everything else, is secondary,”** explained John A. Black III, W&M Class of 1987, who with his wife, Lori, has a senior daughter who moved in Sept. 4. “We just raised a billion dollars. We’re spending \$57 million to turn William & Mary Hall into a Taj Mahal,” referring to a renovation of the basketball arena and the building of an administration building.

Lisa and Dale Szumigala of Colorado Springs, Colorado, brought their daughter, Cassie, back to school Friday. They had just stocked the pantry of the apartment, which is a two-bedroom unit, with about two months’ supply of goods, when their daughter learned via email Saturday that she and her roommate would have to move.

“No one from the college came to Cabell to tell the students of the problem. Parents were not notified, probably because the students are becoming adults, but the (young people) were only notified by email. No personal touch at all,” explained Lisa Szumigala.

“Our daughter’s room did not have mold or mildew, like others nearby, but the room didn’t smell good. The smell was coming from the air conditioning,” Dale Szumigala added.

The Szumigalas were upset and angry, they said, with the events as they unfolded on Saturday.

“Looking at it today we are surprised and disappointed that William & Mary did not act quicker in resolving the problem. The students should never have moved into Cabell Friday at all,” they said during a telephone call.

Click [here](#) to read the article.

See *Mold in Atlanta public schools* on page 7

## Investigation Reveals Years of Mold Issues at 30+ Atlanta Public Schools

Former Atlanta Public School teacher Jeremy Johnson taught in dozens of classrooms throughout his decadelong career. He spent four years at Young Middle School, where he said he switched classrooms several times -- all because of mold.

**"There was mold (on the) ceilings, chairs, desks and it was horrible," Johnson said. "It was to the point where I couldn't teach, and kids certainly couldn't come in that classroom until something was done about it."**

Channel 2 Action News filed an Open Records Request with Atlanta Public Schools asking for emails mentioning mold for the last five years, and cleanup efforts at Young MS.

From that request, we got back hundreds of pages of documents, including air quality complaints from more than 30 other Atlanta public schools.

In 2014, the principal of Kimberly Elementary told administrators he was running out of excuses to explain the school's musty smell, a byproduct of mold. That same year, a Cascade Elementary teacher emailed APS saying that the air quality made her sick, citing moldy papers on her desk as evidence.

At Young Middle School, the spore count near the boys' locker room in July 2017 caused air quality expert Richard Johnson particular concern.

"This would be enough that anybody that was sensitive to allergies, particularly with respect to mold, would have a concern about it," Richard Johnson said.

The district spent more than \$52 million SPLOST dollars in HVAC upgrades since 2012, according to Smith.

Over the next three years, they're slated to spend an additional \$15 million in upgrades to seven more schools.

Young Middle School saw mold complaints and subsequent remediation in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

"There was mold (on the) ceilings, chairs, desks and it was horrible," Johnson said. "It was to the point where I couldn't teach, and kids certainly couldn't come in that classroom until something was done about it."



"People in general who have been exposed to mold over a long period of time can actually develop neurologic symptoms, such as anxiety, decrease in concentration, and also anxiety and mood instabilities."

## Investigation Reveals Years of Mold Issues at 30+ Atlanta Public Schools (cont'd)

Repetitive long-term exposure to mold increases health risks, according to Dr. Lauren Middlebrooks of Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. She told Channel 2 Action News that repeated exposure can especially affect children.

"Naturally, children don't have as strong of immune systems as adults, so they are more prone to get certain symptoms," Middlebrooks said.

**"People in general who have been exposed to mold over a long period of time can actually develop neurologic symptoms, such as anxiety, decrease in concentration, and also anxiety and mood instabilities."**

**Jeremy Johnson recalls that the mold would intensify over summer break, left to incubate in the humidity of the empty school building.**

As the new school year approaches, he believes that the mold remains an issue.

**"I think parents should be concerned, and I think the school system should be concerned, and I definitely think teachers should also be concerned," he said.**

Click [here](#) to read the article.

## Tunbridge Wells Mum Reports Severe Mould in Bedrooms, Hall and Bathroom (U.K.)

Lucy Johnson has mould in her bedrooms, bathroom and hallway and is fighting to get it fixed.

A mum-of-six from Tunbridge Wells has hit out at Town and Country Housing over a long-running issue with mould.

Lucy Johnson, 39, lives with her kids and partner on Rankine Road.

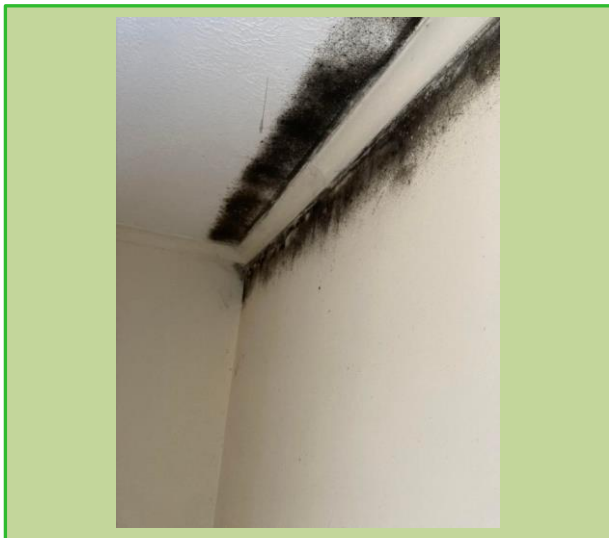
**She says the house is plagued by severe mould in all the bedrooms, hall, and in the bathroom, and she has been fighting for months to get it resolved.**

The mould was reportedly so bad in one of her kids' bedrooms she had to throw out an entire wardrobe of clothes due to the damage.

In February, Lucy contacted Town and Country and although new appliances like an air vent and radiator were installed, the mould issue remained unfixed and continued to spread.

After countless phone calls, inspections, and picture-taking, all unaided by the lockdown, a date was finally fixed.

The works were set to take place over three-days, starting on Tuesday (September 1), with the bedrooms completed in time for the kids' return to school on Thursday (September 4).



## Tunbridge Wells Mum Reports Severe Mould in Bedrooms, Hall and Bathroom (U.K.)--continued

When Tuesday came, things quickly fell apart when the workman realised he didn't have the right equipment for the task.

Louise explained: "A man turns up here on Tuesday to do the mould wash."

"He's got no pictures, he doesn't know what rooms he's got to do, he's got it on his list he's doing the back bedroom and inspecting the hallway."

"I've got on my list he's doing all four bedrooms upstairs."

"It's more than a one-man job. He comes in, looks around the house and is straight on the phone to his supervisor."

"He goes away and comes back in and says, 'it's not getting done today, it might be tomorrow.'"

'They'll contact you. If not, you'll have to wait,' and he just went.

Click [here](#) to read the article.

See *Union issues no-confidence vote* on page 9



## New Jersey Teachers' Union Issues No-Confidence Vote Against Superintendent

A teachers' union in Salem County unanimously issued a vote of no-confidence in the district's superintendent this week, following several health and safety concerns over reopening plans amid the coronavirus pandemic, including allegations of mold.

The vote comes as the district of 2,300 students plans to reopen on Tuesday, Sept. 8 with a hybrid schedule for learning.

The Penns Grove-Carneys Point Regional School Employees Association approved the resolution that said, among other allegations, Superintendent Zenaída Cobian "disingenuously diminished the existence of mold in an email, citing only excerpts of an outside company's findings of fungi as 'slightly elevated' without releasing the entire report."

There were 191 members at the meeting, according to union president Amy Tighe, with three members abstaining from the vote.

Since superintendents are hired by and answer to the district's Board of Education, a vote of no confidence is largely symbolic.

**"We have (had) extreme problems with mold," Tighe told NJ Advance Media. "As soon as my members clean up, the mold has come back."**

Tighe also said hundreds of ceiling tiles have been repeatedly replaced in recent days, and she's continued to find mold in the buildings.

Horizon Environmental tested the indoor air quality in both the middle school and high school. The district received the test results on Aug. 26, which included "slightly elevated" levels of certain types of fungi.

**In the report for the middle school, Horizon Environmental found slightly elevated levels of stachybotrys/memnoniella, coelomycetes, curvularia and paecilomyces-like.**



## New Jersey Teachers' Union Issues No-Confidence Vote Against Superintendent (continued)

**The company found slightly elevated levels of the following in the high school: curvularia; hyphal fragment; bipolaris; epicoccum; stachybotrys/memnoniella; pestalotia/pestalotiopsis; pollen; nigrospora; and polythrincium.**

In both reports, the company defines "slightly elevated" levels as those above that of the outdoor background, but less than 10 times greater.

**It also urges the district to "maintain a proactive approach to mitigating fungi growth and the factors involved in fungi growth," including regular cleanings and replacements of HVAC filters, ventilators and stained ceiling tiles.**

**Other suggestions include immediately replacing ceiling tiles and lowering the humidity in specific rooms. The company also recommends the district consults medical and/or toxicological professionals regarding the findings report.**

The union's no-confidence resolution also includes other allegations, including denying "legitimate staff accommodations," as outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Click [here](#) to read the article.

## University of Virginia Parent Reports Mold-infested Dorm

Jamie Scher says she was moving her son, a second-year University of Virginia student, into his dorm over the Labor Day weekend when she discovered the room was infested with mold.

The moldy dorm room is located in the Lambeth dorm building. Furniture, cabinets, and walls were covered.

She says they had to clean up most of the mold themselves and that she spent more than \$600 to have it tested.

According to Star Environmental Services, the testing company, this mold came from water loss from the living room HVAC unit.

Scher says it was tough having this issue happen to her son because they live so far away.

"It's very nerve-wracking. It was upsetting, but my son and his roommate were very mature about it," she said.

**The mold report says although the unit was cleaned off, the mold will continue to grow back.**

Scher says UVA's Facilities Management worked quickly to move her son and his roommate into a new dorm.

She even says she received several private calls from one university professor and doctor.

**"She told me I had to get him out of there. He can't be there because number one, they're spending tons of time in their rooms because of COVID," Scher said.**

**"That's where they're doing their studying and doing their classes, and if their lungs get compromised from the mold, and if they get COVID, they're going to be a compromised person. They're going to be in a much worse situation."**

Click [here](#) to read the article.

"She told me I had to get him out of there. He can't be there because number one, they're spending tons of time in their rooms because of COVID," Scher said.

"That's where they're doing their studying and doing their classes, and if their lungs get compromised from the mold, and if they get COVID, they're going to be a compromised person. They're going to be in a much worse situation."

## Mum Reports Disgusting Mould in Her Flat (United Kingdom)

Lena McGonigle, 52, said the disgusting black marks cover her two-bedroom flat in Oldham, Greater Manchester, making her feel constantly "dirty" and "sick".

**She told Sun Online: "Mycotoxins from the mould have made my hair fall out and there is a funny taste inside my mouth. I feel like I'm choking all the time and that I can't breathe."**

Lena is a full-time carer for her 29-year-old son Andrew who suffers from autism.

She claims the mould is having a serious impact on her health but neither her landlord Threshold, who run the property, or housing association First Choice Homes Oldham seem to care.

Lena said: "I've sent pictures before and they [First Choice] didn't listen.

Lena spends her days trying to clean the mould away but is fighting a losing battle. But the mould always comes back – leaving a horrible smell that has ruined her carpets and sofa.

She said: "I go out and if I've been out for hours it hits you in the face as soon as you walk through the door the smell.

Click [here](#) to read the article.

## Poor Residents, City No Match for San Jose's Huge 'Faceless, Corporate Slumlord'

Kashana Ashford spent the sweltering Labor Day weekend moving her family out of an extended-stay hotel.

Ashford is a 41-year-old cafeteria worker and former bus driver for the Mountain View Whisman School District. For more than five months she's been bouncing from one temporary housing arrangement to the next with seven children because their apartment at Foxdale Village has been uninhabitable since March.

Up until then, she was paying \$2,277 a month for a four-bedroom on San Jose's east side. It's all her family can afford on a single income. They've lived in that apartment since 2015 and for four years before that they stayed in a different unit at the same complex, just off Capitol Expressway. Two separate leaks earlier this year caused water damage that seeped into her walls, allowing toxic mold to grow — and forcing them out.

"My apartment was a dump," Ashford said.

She and her family, including an 18-month-old toddler and four school-aged children, were living out of their suitcases while the landlord refurbished the unit.

"My son took his first steps at an airbnb," she said.

Ashford said they were finally able to return home last weekend. But the inadequate maintenance that made their home unlivable for so long is symptomatic of bigger problems at the complex, according to Ashford.

The owners "are getting rich off of poor people," she said.

Jaime Angulo, the founding director of Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County's Responsible Landlord Engagement Initiative (RLEI), has been organizing tenants seeking justice from slumlords in San Jose since 2012.

**"They don't take care of their tenants," Angulo said. "And they have a thousand excuses."**

**"They're a faceless, corporate slumlord," said Councilwoman Magdalena Carrasco.**

**"We have a lot of problems on the east side of San Jose but KDF has been the bane of my existence."**

## Poor Residents, City No Match for San Jose's Huge 'Faceless, Corporate Slumlord' (continued)

Her landlord, KDF Communities, owns nine low-income apartment complexes in San Jose with a total of more than 1,600 units — making them one of the largest affordable housing providers in Silicon Valley.

The company has tenants in 120 two-and three-bedroom apartments at Villa Monterey and 143 similar units at Regency Square. KDF also owns 180 one-and two-bedroom units at Casa Real and 288 at Orchard Glen, which are mostly studios and one-bedrooms.

**"They're a faceless, corporate slumlord," said Councilwoman Magdalena Carrasco, who represents the district where Foxdale is located. "We have a lot of problems on the east side of San Jose but KDF has been the bane of my existence."**

Carrasco described the Newport Beach (Orange County) company as "slippery eels," saying it was nearly "impossible to hold them to account."

KDF also has been on the other side of many lawsuits, most notably when more than 20 former tenants in Redwood City sued their landlord after a six-alarm fire destroyed the 72-unit Hallmark House Apartments in 2013. Ninety-seven people were left homeless by the blaze, 21 were sent to the hospital and one man died.

"People are suffering because the landlord won't do the right thing," Angulo said.

Click [here](#) to read the article.

## Home, Not-So-Sweet Home on Military Bases

Navy Lt. Dwight Carter was excited to report to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 2018. He'd been selected to attend the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College there and was looking forward to advancing his naval career through his studies at the prestigious military school.

But just a couple of weeks after he and his family moved into their on-base housing, Carter began feeling ill.

"I experienced chronic and devastating symptoms ranging from cognitive, vision, hearing and memory impairment, tinnitus, arrhythmia, tachycardia, severe abdominal pain, relentless anxiety, numbness in arms and legs, extreme fatigue and many more," he said in a telephone interview.

After seeking medical attention from both military and civilian doctors Carter is convinced the sources of his many ailments are toxic mold, carbon monoxide and lead paint, all of which he and his family were exposed to at their eight-plex unit and at other military housing on the base. He points particularly to a living room HVAC unit that proved to be "a petri dish from hell" of contaminants.

**Carter's case is far from unique. Congressional watchdogs at the Government Accountability Office have looked into multiple cases of illness and severely subpar housing on bases for all of the country's armed services. And they have given the military a flunking grade on the way many servicemen and women have been housed.**

### Toxic Housing, and Reprisals

The Department of Defense doesn't disagree: Of the dozen scathing findings and recommendations the GAO made, DOD has agreed with 10 of them and partially concurs with the other two.

**But Carter's grievance doesn't stop with the allegedly toxic housing. It's also with what he describes as ineffective medical care from both the Army and Navy, and a misdiagnosis of his health concerns as psychological in nature.**

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## Home, Not-So-Sweet Home on Military Bases (continued)

**He said a civilian doctor has diagnosed him as suffering from "acute, high-level exposure to toxic mold and more specifically the poisons they produce, called mycotoxins. The exposure originated from a water-damaged building ecosystem where mold grew unabated and where their toxins permeated the living environment."**

Other grievances he reports include "reprisal, cover-ups, denial of medical care, adverse personnel actions and intimidation." I'm referring to him in this column by a pseudonym.

Even worse, his wife and children had even higher exposures than his.

"Since my wife and children home-school, they were constantly exposed without relief while we were stationed in Kansas," he said. "My wife had asthma attacks, tinnitus, numbness in her legs and arms, and three of our five children suffered from chronic cough and abdominal pain."

So far, his family has stayed healthier than he has. The officer continues to battle health issues, the most devastating being a pulmonary condition that has left him with just 75 percent of his normal breathing function.

### A Huge Problem

The scope of the military housing problem is large.

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## Home, Not-So-Sweet Home on Military Bases (continued)

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Though more than half of military personnel live offsite, the ones who reside on base live in units the Pentagon has contracted out to private companies. And there are a lot of these “privatized” homes: 202,000 units on 80 bases, according to DOD.

As reported in this column earlier this year, the House of Representatives asked GAO to investigate concerns like those brought to the Senate. Overall, GAO’s conclusions paint a picture of shoddy oversight of housing conditions. Amplifying the preliminary recommendations previously reported here, it reported four main findings.

First, the military departments conduct some oversight of the physical condition of housing, but some efforts have been limited in scope.

“For example, annual interior walk-throughs are limited to just a few homes at some installations, which may not comprehensively reflect the condition of the housing units at those installations,” the report said.

Second, the military departments use performance metrics to monitor private partners, but the metrics do not provide meaningful information on the condition of housing.

“A common indicator is how quickly the private partner responded to a work order, not whether the issue was actually addressed,” the report said.

Third, GAO investigators found the military departments and their private partners collect maintenance data on homes, but these data are not captured reliably or consistently.

“DOD is expanding its use of work order data to monitor and track the condition of privatized housing. However, based on GAO’s analysis of data provided by all 14 private partners, these data cannot reliably be used for ongoing monitoring of privatized housing because of data anomalies and inconsistent business practices in how these data are collected,” the report said.

Asked if he wanted to add a recommendation to the GAO’s to rectify what he called “a debacle,” Carter offered this: Cancel private contracts and put “the slumlords” out of business. Bring housing back in-house at DOD. Fix unhealthy housing by leveling it. Incentivize business owners like homebuilders to come in and erect decent, healthy houses.

## Home, Not-So-Sweet Home on Military Bases (continued)

Lastly, DOD provides reports to Congress on the status of privatized housing, but “some data in these reports are unreliable, leading to misleading results,” the report said

### ‘We Are Invisible’

In all, GAO made 12 recommendations: six to top brass at the Pentagon, and two each to the secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force.

**In the meantime, though, many service members and veterans are wondering if their health has been compromised by substandard housing and a seemingly uncaring or intimidating chain of command. Some probably share Carter’s feeling of hopelessness: “We are invisible, without a voice. And we will be gone before anyone notices and cares.”**

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Finally, he thinks military spouses should be put on the oversight boards. That would be a really effective way to make sure everything stays shipshape, he said.

Click [here](#) to read the article.

See *Aspergillosis* on page 14

## Aspergillosis is Found in Soil, Bedding, Pillows and Air Conditioning Systems

Thousands of cases of a life-threatening condition caused by mould lurking in compost heaps, pillows and duvets are being missed in UK hospitals, experts warn.

The illness – called invasive aspergillosis – develops when tiny particles of a common fungus, called aspergillus are inhaled into the lungs, causing an infection which sometimes reaches other organs via the bloodstream.

The average person breathes in hundreds of these invisible spores every single day – and to most people, they are harmless.

But for millions of Britons with lung conditions, weakened immune systems, or even severe flu and Covid-19, they can pose a risk – growing out of control, and invading the delicate lining of the lungs. Balls of fungus can even grow, blocking the airways and causing damage.

Early symptoms include shortness of breath, a fever and a cough that produces bloody phlegm. Although it is treatable with antifungal medication, half of patients still do not survive because diagnosis is delayed.

Now, alarming new research carried out by the University of Manchester suggests thousands of cases among people with chronic pulmonary disease (COPD) – a common group of lung conditions thought to affect three million people in the UK – could be going undiagnosed every year.

Up to two-thirds of those with COPD do not know they have the condition, which also puts them at an increased risk of aspergillosis.

**And experts say symptoms of the fungal infection among hospital patients are often confused for other illnesses, including pneumonia and it could be wrongly treated with bacteria-fighting antibiotics, which have no effect on fungal infections, or other medicines that could make matters worse.**

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## Aspergillosis is Found in Soil, Bedding, Pillows and Air Conditioning Systems (cont'd)

David Denning, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Manchester, says the fungus often grows in pillows and duvets, thriving alongside house dust mites and moisture from sweat.

Some experts suggest those with lung problems should change their pillows as often as every six months – with the most vulnerable, every three months.

'Pillows and duvets have a lot of aspergillus in them,' he says. 'If you fluff up your pillows, you won't breathe in too much. But the moment you start banging them, a lot of aspergillus can be released into the air that you can then breathe in.'

While it was known that people with COPD were at risk of developing aspergillosis, the true scale of the problem was not previously clear.

**Prof Denning says hospitals often fail to test patients for aspergillosis. 'If a patient is breathless and admitted to hospital, and anything abnormal shows up on their chest X-ray, doctors should consider aspergillosis,' he says.**

**'They should not assume it's a bacterial infection, and just give routine antibiotics.'**

Click [here](#) to read the article.

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