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House mold: The nose knows



TOM THOMPSON (6)/PENINSULA DAILY NEWS

Paul Collins and Zena, a mold-detecting canine, are based in Port Angeles as Enviro-Clean Northwest. Zena's main tool: her nose, trained to detect dangerous molds.

Talented breed sniffs out trouble

By LEAH LEACH
PENINSULA DAILY NEWS

PORT ANGELES — “You ready to go to work?” Paul Collins asks Zena, who has been nosing around the room.

The 1-year-old Belgian Malinois tenses into what her owner calls her “driven mode.”

“Find your gift,” Collins tells her, holding his hand near a wall or a corner.

She sniffs energetically, drawing on the herding dog instincts of her breed.

She sits down, looks at a spot, looks at Collins. She’s just found one of the 20 types of toxic mold she’s been trained to detect.

Collins, owner of Enviro-Clean Northwest based in Port Angeles, will either clean the area or take a sample to send to a biochemical lab for analysis of the amount of mold, a low, moderate or high level.

When Collins receives that information, he will give his customer options for cleaning it, including the possibility of bringing in a mold remediation specialist.

Favorite toy

But first, Zena has to have her gift: a game of tug-of-war with her favorite toy.

Zena is one of about 20 dogs in the United States certified as having been trained to detect toxic mold.

She is the only one in the state of Washington, so far as her owner knows, and certainly is unique in the Olympic Peninsula.

She underwent three months of training at the Vom Kaiserhofe Training Center in Lawrence, Kansas, under Tom Brenneman.

Collins joined her for three weeks to become certified with her in the World Detector Dog Association.

He opened his business in October.

It is based in the Lincoln Center at 905 W. Ninth St., as part of the business incubator at Lincoln Center.



Paul Collins with Zena, a Belgian breed certified as trained to detect 20 types of home-area molds.

“It’s so new,” said Collins, adding that many people don’t realize that mold can make them sick.

The toxic mold that can grow in moist places inside a building are not the same molds as those growing outside, said Collins.

“Toxic black mold can be in the walls and invisible to the naked eye,” Collins said, although some can be seen as dark splotches.

Such mold can cause headaches, eye irritation, skin rashes, allergy, sinus or cold and flu symptoms, such as coughing, congestion and fatigue.

Vulnerable residents

A person with a lung disorder or a compromised immune system could be made very ill by long exposure to hidden toxic mold, he said.

The most common type of mold Collins and Zena have found in the Peninsula is a wood-based mold called *cladosporium sphaerospermum*.



Above, Collins prompts Zena to a cupboard he suspects may contain mold during an inspection of a residence. At right, the investigators enter a room, with Zena wheeling into a turn during their check on a residence.

with exposure over a long period of time.
Two other common molds in the Peninsula are penicillium citrinum and stachybotrys sp.
The cost of Collins' service is based on square footage and number of samples taken.
Generally, the cost ranges from \$175 to \$375.
For more information, phone Collins at 360-670-4595 or 360-565-2067.



At left, Collins looks on as Zena lays on the carpet to indicate she has detected the presence of a mold they have targeted.
At right, Zena chomps into her favorite reward for a hard day's work — a tug-of-war with Collins with a well-used chew toy in between.

