

TOXIC MOLD hidden health hazard

By CARRIE HEATON
SPECIAL SECTIONS EDITOR

Spring is slowly creeping in, and it's time to start turning thoughts to spring cleaning. This year though, consider adding something new to your routine – an inspection for toxic mold.

Living on the North Olympic Peninsula, residents are faced with the problem of excess moisture in addition to the relative humidity found in any building. This combination can breed mold in places you would likely never look.

"Toxic mold is often found in areas where water has damaged building materials and furnishings or along walls where warm moist air condenses on cooler wall surfaces," says Paul Collins, owner of Enviro-Clean Northwest a canine mold inspecting company in Port Angeles. "Common places include cold exterior walls, behind dressers, headboards and in closets where articles are stored against walls."

This past winter we saw an above average rainfall and several severe storms that caused flooding of homes and businesses. With the extra moisture, comes an increased threat of mold in your home.

"Now is the time to consider having your home inspected for mold to avoid the potential health hazards that toxic mold can present," says Collins.

The word toxic mold has been thrown around a lot in the media, but what exactly does that mean? How does toxic mold differ from other types of mold?

Mold is present almost everywhere. The difference between a mold and toxic mold comes from the type of spores they produce. Toxic

molds produce toxic liquid or gaseous compounds called mycotoxins. It is these mycotoxins that have the potential to be harmful or lethal to humans and animals when exposure is high enough.

Sensitivity to these mycotoxins differ from person to person. Common effects include; chronic fatigue and irritability, flu-like symptoms, respiratory problems, headaches, cognitive problems and skin problems. Those with allergies tend to have a worse reaction.

A mold inspection determines if mold is present in a building, and if found whether it is toxic or not.

Mold inspections can be an invasive process that can result in the cutting of walls and carpets to check for mold. Where is cut is determined by the location of where water damage most likely has occurred.

A newer and less invasive method of mold inspection takes advantage of man's best friend. Enviro-Clean Northwest uses Zena's powerful nose to determine exactly where mold is located. A canine's nose is 10,000 times more powerful

than the human's nose.

Once mold is detected, the inspector takes a sample and sends it off to a lab to be identified.

A follow-up meeting will then be set to discuss the results of the tests.

An inspector should explain what types of mold were found, and then offer suggestions on remediation.

Some situations can be taken care of simply, but other times it can require a referral to a licensed mold remediator who will come into your home or business and properly destroy the toxic mold.

Before cleaning mold that either you or an inspector finds, be sure to do a bit of research. A common notion is that bleach kills all mold, but beware this is not the case. It can at times in fact have the opposite effects on toxic mold and instead cause more mycotoxins.

According to the Environ-

mental Protection Agency, the key to basic cleanup of mold is moisture control. Dry any water damaged area within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth.

If mold is already a problem, clean it up and get rid of excess water or moisture.

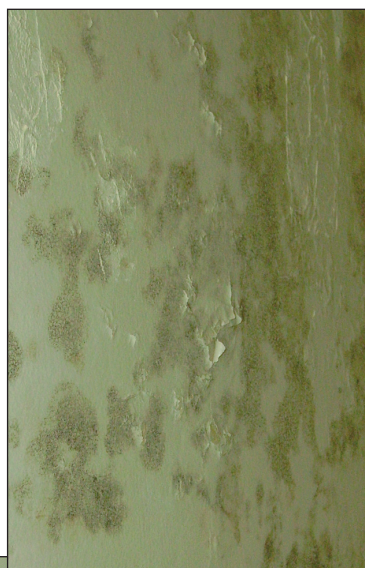
Also, be sure to fix any leaky plumbing or other sources of water.

Paul Collins and Zena can be reached at 360-670-4595 for more information on toxic mold and inspection with Enviro-Clean Northwest.



PHOTOS BY CARRIE HEATON

Paul Collins, owner and canine handler for Enviro-Clean Northwest, and Zena. With the help of Zena's nose, the pair are able to detect 20 varieties of toxic molds growing in homes and businesses that can pose serious health risks if left undetected.



PHOTOS BY ENVIRO-CLEAN NORTHWEST

Toxic mold thrives in warm, damp places as seen here in a Port Angeles home's bathroom. Though this toxic mold is in plain sight, it is often found behind furniture and in walls where you can't easily detect it.

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