

Strategies for Preventing or Removing Mold Growth After Contamination

Handout 4

Clean It and Dry It

After a flood, fire or water leak, walls and floors that were soaked for more than a few hours may have absorbed large amounts of water. These areas must be cleaned, dried and disinfected. If necessary, remove the wallboard and flooring materials to dry out these areas.

Mold has been found growing in wet insulation several months after a flood. Remove and discard wet insulation.

The insulation and the wooden studs may be wet for two or more feet above the flood's high-water level because of absorption by the materials and wicking to other areas.

Organic matter from floodwater must be cleaned up.

Using a solution of detergent, water and trisodium phosphate, scrub all contaminated areas with a brush and rinse thoroughly. Scrub any exposed wood in the wall cavities with a detergent before disinfecting and drying.

Use fans, dehumidifiers and air conditioners to dry a wet area. If using a dehumidifier, empty the water collection pan frequently or drain it through a hose to a floor drain. Mold can grow in the water standing in the collection pan. Air conditioners remove moisture from the air and help promote drying. If the outdoor air is dry, leave a window open to promote drying. Several weeks or months may pass before soaked walls and floors are dry enough to re-insulate and reinstall wall board or flooring.

Discard Wet Materials That Cannot Be Dried Quickly

Carpets and carpet padding, draperies, mattresses, box springs and upholstered furniture that have been soaked or stored in a damp environment are nearly impossible to clean and dry quickly enough to prevent mold growth. Mold thrives under wet carpet or padding and inside mattresses and upholstery. If these products have only a small amount of mold growth on the surface, they may be dried in the sun. Sunlight kills mold, but it may also fade textiles. Therefore, sun drying may be a method of last resort in attempting to save items that are about to be discarded.

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