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Newspaper Column

The abundant rainfall has prompted a review of how to clean flood damaged homes. Since mold can multiply on materials that stay wet for more than 2–3 days and that mold is more difficult to control the longer it is allowed to grow, the clean-up and dry out should start as soon as possible. The following mold clean-up guidelines include five steps.

First, remember to minimize exposure to mold during clean-up. Since people are mainly exposed to mold by breathing spores or fragments and through skin contact, it is recommended that wearing gloves and a respirator that can filter mold spores is a good idea.

Secondly, while disturbing mold colonies can cause an abundant release of spores, it is best to seal off the contaminated area from the rest of the house. And, if possible, it is best to use a fan to exhaust air to the outdoors.

Thirdly, the removal of moldy materials is next. Porous moldy and sewage contaminated materials should be removed, placed in bags, and discarded. Items such as gypsum wallboard, insulation, plaster, carpets, carpet pads, ceiling tiles, processed wood products, and paper are examples of contaminated materials that will need to be removed. Also, to minimize the spread of spores, cover moldy material with plastic to contain spores before removing to discard. Remember, all wet non-moldy fibrous insulation and other materials that are unlikely to dry quickly, should be removed and replaced too.

Surface molds on non-porous materials such as hard plastic, concrete, glass, metal and solid wood can usually be cleaned, but remember cleaning removes mold but does not kill spore growth. So after cleaning, a disinfectant should be used to kill mold. A common disinfectant solution of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup bleach per gallon of water can be used on color-fast and non-metal surfaces. Milder and less corrosive disinfectants include alcohols, disinfecting cleaners, and hydrogen peroxide. And remember all safety precautions such as: always handle disinfectants with care, never use bleach solution in the air system, never mix bleach with ammonia.

The fifth step in the mold cleanup is to dry all materials as quickly as possible. If possible, utilize fans, de-humidifiers, air-conditioning or heat to speed drying time. Keep in mind that new mold colonies can form in as little as three days if materials stay wet, and that wood related materials that may look dry can still be wet enough to support regrowth.

Finally, remain on a mold watch. Should mold return to the area, repeat the cleaning steps and consider hiring a water damage restoration contractor who will have special equipment for the drying process. Remember, regrowth may signal that the material was not dry enough or should be removed, but no matter what the reason, rebuilding should not begin until all affected materials have dried completely.

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