

There is a Fungus Among Us

By George Porter

Not that we need something else to worry about but... TIME Magazine, in the July 2, 2001 edition, ran an article on mold that was chilling if not totally frightening. The article concerned itself with mold; you know the stuff on old bread etc. Mold has been around forever (literally) and there shouldn't be any new shocking news about it....guess again! The title of the article (in red print no less) is "BEWARE: TOXIC MOLD". You might be thinking this is just another "panic attack" to sell the magazine, I don't think so. It is just a two page filler and is not mentioned on the cover. There is a huge warning for this industry here, please read on and think about it.

The article begins by talking about some people in Texas near Houston who were always sick with a cough and runny eyes. They lived in an upscale home that cost about \$300,000 and were not just scraping along; they probably could have most anything they wanted. They had an inspector go over the house in a desperate attempt to get a clue as to why they were so physically miserable and he discovered a mold within the walls called *stachybotrys atra* - a fungus that has been linked to everything from sinus infection to brain damage- an industrial hygienist warned the homeowners to evacuate. They abandoned their home forever!

Remember a movie called "Erin Brockovich"? In case you didn't know it, the lady is real, not fiction and she and an army of other lawyers are suing home builders, landlords, and insurers for damages to property and health. Last month the California state senate approved a bill which sets a standard for acceptable levels of mold indoors and requires home sellers to disclose mold problems. On June 4, 2001 a jury found that Farmers Insurance should pay Melinda Ballard of Dripping Springs, Texas, \$32 million for mold damage to her 22 room mansion and for the ensuing mental anguish.

Farmers Insurance estimates that in Texas alone it will have to shell out \$85 million in mold claims and has eliminated coverage in 30 other states. The article goes on and on about many other places that have big problems with mold and shows pictures of people wearing white coveralls and special masks looking at moldy walls. Several people have actually burned their homes to the ground because they could not get rid of the stuff (there are pictures of that too).

The article has a little box within it that tells you what you can do to protect yourself from mold. First it says, there is no way you can eliminate mold spores from entering the home. Just like the mold on bread, it is already everywhere and if given the opportunity, it will grow. The only defense is to not give mold the environment it needs to grow. (Read this last sentence 3 times!)

To grow mold you need three (3) things

1. Mold spores, no problem, they are everywhere and in everything, they are unavoidable.
2. A porous surface, such as wood, drywall, carpeting, paper, food, clothing, basically everything in your home.

3. Water, not much, just enough to make a very slightly humid area

You can clean up small patches of mold with 5 parts water and 1 part bleach, but of course you have to see it and be able to get to it. The mold in the floors and walls is out of reach.

This brings us to us.

The good news is that not once in the article did it mention “trailer”, “mobile home”, or even Manufactured Housing. The other good news is they obviously never looked.

Grading the lot is in every manual in the business and so is the formula for proper ventilation year-around. These are the absolute cornerstones of mold avoidance. Don't properly ventilate and grade and you will have humidity within the walls, floors, and ceilings, and mold will grow. So will your liability I think, or maybe you will just get lucky and no one will notice.

Seen any dampness under a home lately?