

# Environmental health assessment



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Environmental Health Assessment Introduction A Mold or Mould is a microscopic fungus that grows in moist surfaces. Mold can be in any colour and they come in thousands of varieties. Molds can be seen indoors as well as outdoors (Mold in the Home. 2005). Molds generally do not cause serious illness other than allergic reactions, though there are rare cases of certain types of fungi causing infections in healthy people. Asthma patients are sensitive to molds. The common diseases reported due to excessive molds are Hypersensitivity Pneumonitis, Sick Building Syndrome, and Mycotoxins etc. Studies have revealed that new born and infants are the most affected by molds other than hypersensitive people (Peters. E. J). Mold formation can be seen in various places - indoor and outdoor. The commonly found species of molds are Aspergillus, Stachybotrys, Cladosporium, Fusarium, Pencillium, Memnoniella, Alternaria, Mucor and Mycotoxins (Mold Types - Common Species of Mold. 2008, Mold Removal Unit. 2003). Of these, Stachybotrys and Memnoniella are very toxic and the others are common house molds. They require moist cellulose areas like wet wood, paper and cotton to grow (Mold Removal Unit. 2003.) . Mold is usually spotted on moist open areas like wet walls, open water in/outlets, leaking walls, decaying plants, wet soil, wet carpet etc (Mold Types - Common Species of Mold. 2008, Mold Removal Unit. 2003 ). Though there are many methods prevailing that can detect some types of mold, they are not 100% efficient due to the following factors:

Molds exist in every kind of environment.

Identification of the mold type is of little importance and sample testing can reveal only part of the mold that is sample tested. There may be other types in un-sampled portions.

Most of the molds produce toxins in different quantities and at different toxic

levels. Whatever level of toxin it produces, any mold development should be curbed at the earliest.

It has not been proven how much of mold will become unsafe for the environment.

Mold detection does not imply that it should be removed. Though health advisors / conscious people would prefer that molds be removed effectively once it is detected, there's no legal obligation for the same except in few countries (Testing for Mold. 2008.)

Toxic Mold Protection Act of 2001 & United States Toxic Mold Safety and Protection Act of 2003

Owing to the possible environment health hazards of molds and growing public concerns & litigations over molds, the Toxic Mold Protection Act of 2001 (Mold Bill) and United States Toxic Mold Safety and Protection Act of 2003 (The Melina Bill) were formed in the United States. The Mold Bill, though not a law, has asked the Department of Health Services (DHS) of California to organize a special team consisting of medical and health experts, mold removal experts, government representatives, representatives from Californian companies and workers, and affected consumers and industries. The team will analyse the possible health hazards due to various types and intensity of molds and set criteria for estimation, detection and remediation of mold. The team was to be effective from 2002. Due to the inefficiency of existing mold detection techniques and since mold detection is not compulsory the effectiveness of the Act is limited (Nerland). The Melina Bill was proposed by US Representative John Coyer after one of Coyer's staff's 9 year old daughter, Melina, developed a major lung problem after they shifted to a house infested with the toxic *Stachybotrys* mold. This Act

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has authorized various public sector agencies to act together and / or severally to perform required functions for the study, prevention, detection and remediation of indoor and toxic molds. The recommendations include public awareness programs, tax credits, compulsory periodic mold detection and remediation reports for existing and ongoing constructions, mold hazard disclosure regulations, insurance, grants etc. once it is approved (United States Toxic Mold Safety and Protection Act of 2003.).

#### Effects of Legal Mold Policies

The Mold policies have created much hype for molds. This has led to an increased number of big & small companies claiming to help the public with mold hazards whereas very few of them can do at least a small percentage of what they claim. The growing public awareness can be one of the reasons for the increasing number of litigations involving indoor and toxic molds. In most of the cases it amounts to the hype created by the companies developing and marketing the so-called mold prevention, detection and remediation tools (Haisley. 2003.)

#### Recommendations

Similarly steps should be taken by the government to impose regulations on the companies developing and marketing the so-called mold prevention, detection and remediation tools. The government should also form a special team to develop and stipulate the pre-requisites such as education, training, testing, documentation etc. for mold detection and the circumstances under which mold should be remediate. Also the government can give licences / certifications to such firms conforming to the stipulated requirements and educate the public to ensure they approach an authorized mold remediation company (Dewar). Though indoor mold growth should be treated and cured,

unless and until proven scientific methods are not developed and established for measuring the levels and risks of exposure, it is better to maintain a middle-of-the-road approach towards molds.

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