

Mold and Your Office

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What Is It?

Mold is neither plant nor animal. It exists everywhere. You can find it inside, outside and on many surfaces.

Mold is a living thing; to grow it needs nutrients (practically anything), the right temperature and moisture or wetness.

Our offices and homes are at an ideal temperature for mold to grow. It can grow on almost any organic matter. What keeps it in check is a lack of moisture. Our buildings are usually too dry for it to grow.

So a good rule of thumb for all AFGE Reps and members is: Where there is moisture, there may be mold.

How Do I find it?

Often we will find mold in our offices or homes following major storms, floods, roof or plumbing leaks and similar events.

Pay attention to what happens after one of these. Look for clues that you may have a moisture problem, clues like wet or stained ceiling tiles, water, moisture or dampness in floor board or dry wall, damp spots or wet stains in carpets.

Additionally, let your nose be your guide. Molds can have strong odors. A musty odor is a very good clue that mold is present.

If your office has vinyl wall paper look for a pinkish discoloration, particularly on outside walls, or where an inside wall joins an outside wall. This is a strong indicator that mold may be growing under the wall paper.

Always keep your eyes and nose open. A few years ago a flood on the Truckee River caused the Reno, Nevada field office to close for a short time.

When the employees returned, among other things they noticed strange odors. Mold had found a way to enter the office and found a good place to grow and thrive -- behind the office file cabinets.

Any time you suspect wetness a good strategy to do is not only looking where you can see changes or wet spots, also check areas such as behind file cabinets where you ordinarily would not look.

What Effects does it have?

When people hear the word "mold", they think about health problems. Mold is not always responsible for health problems and not all molds are bad molds. (Penicillin, for example.)

One form of mold that has received a lot of attention in the media is stachybotrys chartarum.

This type of mold resulted in the deaths of some children in Cleveland and has been responsible for some homes being leveled. But the mold may or may not cause health impacts for adults.

The mold itself is greenish or blackish in color. One place in which it was found was in the Western Program Service Center's basement equipment room where it grew on the wet drywall. It was later abated and removed.

The mold also was found in the Vancouver, Washington field office which is part of the Vancouver federal building and action too was taken to remove the mold.

Mold again has varied health impacts--each person is different. Each person reacts differently to chemicals and other stimuli. People who have severe allergies or asthma are most at risk for mold impacts as are people with immune suppressive diseases such as HIV or lupus.

What should AFGE Reps do when they encounter mold?

1. Always check out your work place and look for any changes particularly after a rain storm, leak or flood.
2. When you find a problem write to management and email a copy to all members of your facility.

Example:

From: Good Rep
TO: B Manager

Sub: Safety Concern

AFGE has received some complaints from fellow workers. (Article 9 Section 3A 4 states that the designated rep can receive reports of unsafe or unhealthy conditions as well as management).

I am informing you of this report in accordance with article 9, section 3A5.

AFGE recognizes the administration's responsibility under Article 9, Section 1A of providing all employees with a safe and healthy work environment. Our goal is to work with you in accordance with Article 9, Section 1 B to avoid and reduce the possibility of and and/or eliminate accidents, injuries and health hazards in *all areas* under the Employer's control.

The condition is as follows (explain the problem in detail).

If it cannot be abated within 30 calendar days please follow the procedures in article 9, Section 4C and prepare an abatement plan containing an explanation of the circumstances of the delay in abatement, a proposed timetable for abatement and a summary of steps being taken in the interim to protect employees from being injured as a result of the unsafe or unhealthy working conditions.

cc: State Designee

What should happen?

Management should seek assistance via the Region's Field Facility Staff and through them possibly with the agency's Office of Environmental Health and Occupational Safety or OEHOS.

If you cannot assistance through these avenues you can escalate the action to the national health and safety committee members Howard Egerman and Mary V. Harris

At the same time you should provide your fellow employees with information on mold. A good site for information is the Center for Disease Control. Recommend they use www.cdc.gov/mold .For stachybotrys the site is www.cdc.gov/mold/stachy.htm,

Also a great site from California is www.dhs.ca.gov/ohb/HESIS/molds.pdf .

AFGE Cares about employee health and safety. Your Field Office Council 220 is ready to help.