

Managing Mold

Written by Sam Burroughs

How adding Mold remediation services to your business model can help clients find relief.



Floodwater fills the news reports and the headlines say that Louisiana is experiencing the worst flooding since Hurricane Sandy. This has left some of us wondering: what will happen once the water abates? The cleaning process for extreme water damage is exhaustive and being prepared to deal with the aftermath of water damage is a crucial part of providing comprehensive services that allow your organization to keep growing.

One of the most important aspects of this is mold remediation. Any type of mold can cause health issues so it is important that all mold concerns are dealt with quickly and efficiently. Guidelines for the remediation process are outlined by the Environmental Protection Agency and can aid in developing mold remediation as a pertinent service you can offer. Mold can quickly become an infestation. Developing team members that are trained to deal with mold, as well as acquiring suggested equipment, will create a valuable and necessary niche in your business that compliments your other services.



The nature of the beast

Mold can never be fully eliminated. It exists on a microscopic level and can be found indoors and outdoors. It can enter a structure by simply wafting inside or attaching itself to clothing or shoes. Once taking root in a damp area, the mold will begin to grow. It's able to spread within 48 hours and can destroy whatever surface it lands on by digesting it. The key to mold growth is moisture. Mold remediation will come hand in hand with identifying sources of excessive moisture and addressing them. Any type of mold can cause health complications such as allergies and respiratory illness. Because of this, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that identifying the specific type of mold you're dealing with is an unnecessary part. Mold sampling is expensive and the standards for evaluating what constitutes as an acceptable quantity of mold are subjective. The CDC recommends remediating the mold and working to prevent future growth. The highest priority of those performing remediation should be the health and safety of the building's occupants and the employees working on the remediation.

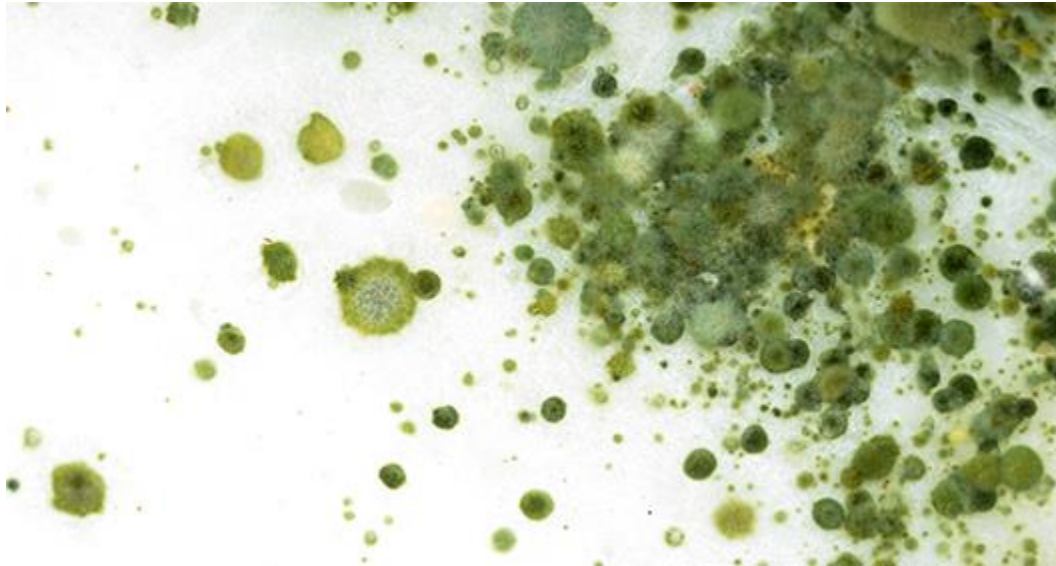


First steps

Before you can address mold concerns, you must first identify the source of the water or moisture. Providing this first step will prevent the structure from having a repeated problem and allow your remediation experts to isolate and treat the existing issue effectively.

Recommending that the humidity below 45 percent is one way to begin serving your clients. Training employees to be able to identify mold is also an important first step. Mold can emit an odor, which is one of the first indications that a problem exists. The EPA recommends answering the following questions before servicing the building: Are there other existing moisture problems? How long have materials been wet? Where, if any, are the hidden sources of water? Is the humidity high enough to cause condensation? Is there a musty odor? Are the building occupants reporting health problems? Are any building materials visibly damaged? Has there been recent remodeling to the structure? Have medical professionals been consulted?

Keeping in mind all these elements can help you begin to form a plan on how to handle the mold remediation process.



The Process

After the assessment and preparation process, your next step will be selecting personal protective equipment (PPE) and containment equipment. There are three levels of PPE. The minimum recommended level by the EPA includes gloves, a N-95 respirator, and goggles or other eye protection. The next level includes those three items and disposable overalls. The last level calls for gloves, disposable full body clothing, head gear, foot coverings and a full-face respirator with a HEPA filter. The level of PPE will be determined by the situation. You will also determine how large your team needs to be. The EPA suggests a straight forward remediation process. While effective, some experts also perform additional services during the process to serve the client.

Your first job: quickly identify the source of excess water or humidity and address that first. Then, you can begin the mold remediation process.

Your first job is to fix the water or humidity problem. This may include having to remove or repair furniture, dry wall and other in-house equipment. During the assessment, the length of time that has passed is important to note as cleaning methods will vary depending on time. After 48 hours, more intense methods of remediation may be required as mold grows and spreads quickly.

Next, is the remediation. Advanced equipment can be used. This equipment includes: negative air chambers to isolate the area and prevent mold spores from spreading, specialized filtration equipment to capture the mold spores out of the air, powerful air scrubbers, and HEPA vacuums to prevent the spread of mold spores during the process. Dehumidifiers, water extraction vacuums, fans, and heaters are also recommended equipment. Containing the mold can be done using a polyethylene sheeting from ceiling to floor around the affected area. Blocking supply and return air vents in the area is also recommended. For more severe cases, fire-retardant polyethylene sheeting with an airlock chamber is recommended by the EPA.

Cleaning and removing the mold can be as simple as wiping the surface with a mild detergent and allowing to dry, according to the EPA. The medium used to remove mold growth can depend on the amount of mold and type of surfaces. Anti-fungal and antimicrobial treatments can also be used to eliminate mold colonies. A wet vacuum and steam cleaner may help you serve areas with carpets and some upholstered furniture. Wood surfaces should be

cleaned with a wood floor cleaner and scrubbing is an essential part of the process.

After purging and replacing the unrepairable, sanitizing what is left such as furniture, decorative items, curtains, and other items affected by the mold is the next step. Once the remediation process is complete, all occupants of the building will have a safe and clean environment that will pose no mold-related health complications.

Certification

You have a lot of options in how to certify employees in mold remediation. The EPA does not outline or suggest one particular certification program, rather it promotes using available resources to educate your organization on how to make decisions regarding mold remediation. There are several certifications that can help you ensure to your clients that you are providing top-quality service that meets and exceeds the industry's standards. Regular IICRC industry certifications, employee certifications, in-house training, and online learning programs are all options. On the next page, we've listed a few possible certifications you can get to help meet industry standards.

Optional Certifications for Mold Remediation Specialists

Applied Microbial Remediation Technician

A four-day course will cover mold and sewage remediation techniques. It will also provide education on how to protect the health and safety of both the workers and the occupants of the building.

Applied Structural Drying Technician

This three-day certification course will properly train technicians on how to dry water-damaged structures using monitoring devices, extraction systems, and drying equipment.

Odor Control Technician

A two-day course on odor control teaches technicians fiber identification, upholstery cleaning methods, and identifying upholstery cleaning problems before they become distorted.

Water Damage Restoration Technician

A three-day course that covers the effects of water damage in residential and commercial settings. Technicians will learn how to deal with water losses, sewer back flow, and mold contamination.

For more details on certifications, visit www.iicrc.org.

Programs designed in-house or web based programs can also improve the knowledge of your mold remediation specialists. All of these educational materials and programs will help them deal with mold emergencies in the commercial setting.

Mold remediation is an essential, year-round service that will help you maintain a high-standard of safety and cleanliness for both your clients and your employees. With an investment in equipment, education, and optional certifications, your business can offer one of the most highly needed services to its repertoire.

Source: <http://servicesmag.org/online-digital-magazine/digital-archives/item/848-managing-mold>