

New drywall aims to cut mold and mildew

BY GARY DYMSKI
Newsday

Perhaps no other building product is as underappreciated as drywall. Bend it, shape it, paint it. Plaster or panel over it. The result is an inexpensive and dependable wall covering. Even the most difficult parts of "hanging" drywall — taping and finishing — have been made more convenient over the years with products such as fiberglass tape, premixed joint compounds and dust-free sanding equipment. But this month the building industry might be in for one of the biggest drywall breakthroughs since 1890, when Augustine Sackett and Fred L. Kane developed a "plaster board" for the New York Coal Tar Chemical Co. Humitek, a mold- and moisture resistant drywall from USG Corp., is expected to be on the market some time this month. The panels, which will be available initially in a 1/2-inch thickness, will run 8, 10 and 12 feet in length and will be identified by a

light-face blue paper and the Humitek brand name printed on taped edges. Homeowners and contractors should be careful not to confuse Humitek with traditional "blue-board," which is used for veneer plaster applications. Humitek contains a biocide, from the blue face paper to the brown paper backing, to fight against mold and mildew. These new panels are an improvement over "green-board," a moisture-resistant drywall used for non-water bearing walls in bathrooms and kitchens. With greenboard, moisture can penetrate the board's core, where mold and mildew can grow. In regions where high humidity, especially in finished basements, is a concern, Humitek is likely to be a popular product. "It's going to be well received, I will tell you that, because mold and mildew are huge concerns in the building industry," said Brendan McKenna, manager of Kamco Supply Corp. in Syosset, N.Y.,

which plans to stock the new drywall. "But pricing will be an issue." Humitek is likely to cost about twice as much as regular drywall, which runs anywhere from \$6 to \$8 per sheet, depending on thickness. On the plus side, Humitek is no more labor intensive than normal drywall. Except for a specially made joint compound, Humitek can be installed and finished just like regular drywall. McKenna said that contractors and homeowners who want mold- and mildew protection will probably compromise when it comes to using Humitek. "They'll want it for the basement or another area where moisture might be a problem," he said. "Then they'll use regular drywall where moisture won't be a problem." The introduction of Humitek is part of USG's push toward building products — and practices — that address the industry's growing concern with moisture control. Over the

past few years, for example, toxic mold has become a nightmare for builders, insurance and real estate companies and manufacturers of construction materials. According to the folks at USG, developing more moisture-resistant products is just one way to battle mold and mildew. The other strategy, and perhaps most important, is to protect materials and equipment from exposure to moisture during virtually every phase of the construction or remodeling process, from product storage to project completion. USG is not the only manufacturer to introduce a moisture and mildew resistant interior wall product. Georgia-Pacific recently introduced DensArmor Plus, which uses inorganic glass fibers on its mat surfaces and in its gypsum core to ward off mold and mildew. The drawback to DensArmor is that it is labor intensive. To get mold and mildew resistance on both faces of the DensArmor panels the

HOME FACTS

Termite troubles

These tiny creamy-white insects infest approximately 600,000 U.S. homes every year, causing damages that total \$1.5 billion. They can't be seen or heard and only a trained inspector can detect these pests. Here are ways to avoid infestation:

- Stack firewood, lumber and wood items away from building. Wood porches, patios, docks and separate buildings should be more than one foot from contact with your home's foundation. All wood in contact with the ground should be pressure-treated.
- Repair any leaking water lines or fixtures. Also repair any eaves, downspouts, gables or shingles.
- Monitor or reduce moisture levels in any crawl spaces.
- Replace outdoor light from white bulbs to yellow or pale amber during the spring to reduce attraction of any night-swarming termites.

SOURCE: National Pest Management Association

exposed face must be finished with a skimcoat of a joint compound or a roll of a drywall surfacer. McKenna said that most of the major drywall manufacturers will be coming out with mold-and-mildew resistant panels soon. He suggests that price will likely come down as similar products are introduced into the marketplace.

But if you're scheduled for a remodeling project and have moisture concerns, McKenna said "don't hesitate" to use the new drywall. "It's well worth the added cost," he said. For information on Humitek or Dens Armor, visit the company Web sites: www.usg.com and www.gp.com/gypsum/densarmor.

Pet project: Letting your home decor go to the dogs

BY CHANDRA ORR
Copley News Service

Simple chic. Sparse elegance. Call it what you will — muted furniture, clean lines and understated accessories dynamically displayed against splashes of color is still the in look. But what's stylish for humans is also fun and functional for our furry companions. Julia Szabo, author of "Animal House Style: Designing a Home to Share with Your Pets" and pet columnist for the New York Post, has gathered numerous tips and tricks for creating the perfect abode for those with pets. Simple white slipcovers, sisal rugs, pared-down furnishings and artsy pet provisions set against colorful walls make a design statement and transform any living space into a comfortable, easy-to-clean environment for a family with four-pawed members.

The best part? This living room redo can be completed in a weekend. The look starts with white slipcovers — yes, white. "Conventional wisdom says that you should have patterns and darker colors," Szabo said. "But that will be less forgiving to smudges left behind." "Many pet guardians have white slipcovers, believe it or not. If you have really dark slipcovers you might put off washing them because you don't notice the dirt as much, whereas with white you see what went wrong," Szabo said. Preferably, pet people should have two sets of white slipcovers — one to use while the other is in the wash with bleach, leaving them perfectly clean after each muddy paw print, drool disaster or accident. "White slipcovers help maintain a higher standard of cleanliness — and it's really fashionably stark," Szabo said.

White slipcovers can pull together a room full of mismatched, even damaged furniture, and can be dressed up with splashy, colorful pillows to keep up with changing design trends. Many retailers' home sections and catalogues offer simple, stylish slipcovers in cotton, canvas, denim, twill and even chenille. Once the slipcovers are chosen, the floor is the next area to tackle. "Animals spend a lot of their time there and a lot of accidents happen there," Szabo said. "If you're going to have a rug you better be prepared to wash it more frequently. It's preferable to have bare wood or tile floors." Wood, tile or cement floors are ideal — they don't trap hair, dust or odors, and they help keep pets cool when warm weather strikes. However, Szabo knows some people may want a little cushioning under foot. For those home-

owners who simply must have rugs, sisal and sea grass rugs are the answer. "Sisal and sea grass are brilliant because they warm up floors and are really durable: You can hose out accidents, cats can scratch at them, and dogs' nails don't wreck it. Plus, the natural fiber smells really good," she said. Sisal and sea grass rugs are relatively inexpensive and they are readily available at many home furnishings stores. Homeowners hesitant to rip up the carpeting for the sake of easy cleanup should seek out rugs with rubber backing, which will prevent any liquids from seeping through to the carpet, Szabo said. Be sure to choose something inexpensive in case stubborn stains refuse to come out. To offset the white slipcovers and natural rugs, Szabo suggests infusing the room with



This pet-friendly room features hardwood floors, an easy-cleaning rug and washable slipcovers.

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