

# Help for controlling household mold and mildew

BY PAT STEIN

Copley News Service

A spate of lawsuits, claiming that mold has caused everything from learning disabilities to infant lung bleeding, and extreme measures, such as burning down houses to get rid of infestations, have transformed the humble fungus into a hot-button issue.

"Mold was written about in the Bible. It has been around for thousands of years and there's not much about mold that has changed over the centuries. Mold spores can be found in almost any static air test — even out on the freeway," said Dick Rennick, chief executive officer of American Leak Detection in Palm Springs, Calif.

What has changed, according to Rennick, are building methods and materials.

"Today, homes are built tighter," Rennick said, adding that mold seems to thrive on modern building materials such as drywall.

Controlling moisture is the key to controlling mold, according to George Bean, a biologist in the Department of Cell Biology and Molecular Genetics at the University of Maryland who has been studying mold for decades.

"Mold spores need relative humidity of 70 percent or more to germinate and mold needs a food source, which can be anything from the paper on drywall to cellulose (wood fiber)," Bean said.

Mold is a fungus similar to the mushroom. There are at

least 100,000 different kinds of mold, 1,000 of which are present in the United States. Although most of us only recognize mold when we see it growing, Bean says mold spores — the microorganisms that become mold — are always present.

Some molds are actually beneficial and edible. The mold fungus penicillium roquefordi is the source of the antibiotic penicillin and also of the blue streaks in Roquefort cheese. The statin drugs that are used to treat high cholesterol are also the byproduct of mold, according to Bean.

Bean says that although it is known that some people may be highly sensitive to mold and that mold can aggravate allergies, "the whole mold issue has been blown out of proportion."

In Bean's opinion, the controversy has led to scare tactics and some scams when it comes to mold detection and treatment. Since there are no state or federal regulatory agencies overseeing the business of mold testing, it's strictly a case of buyer beware.

"Mold spores are everywhere, so if you have a mold detection company come out to your house, they will certainly be able to find evidence of mold," he said.

Stachybotrys, the so-called black mold, is the "bad boy" of molds. Even though scientists have known about stachybotrys for decades, it's still unclear what level of exposure triggers serious health problems in humans,



CNS Photo/Nancee E. Lewis.

**Workers in protective gear inspect an area where mold has been found. There are about 1,000 different kinds of mold in the United States and experts say the key to controlling it is to control moisture.**

according to Bean. Still, it's an unwanted invader in your home. The good news is that it requires a high level of moisture to thrive.

"This means you should always be aware when your home has had extensive

water damage," Rennick said. "It only takes 24 hours for mold to start growing under your carpet if you spill liquid and don't dry it up."

Rennick suggests treating moldy areas with a solution of 1 1/2 cups of bleach to 1 gal-

lon of water. He says this will kill mold and may remove stains. Bean prefers cleaning away the mold with a solution of soap and water and then spraying the affected area with Sporocidin, an anti-bacterial agent that can be purchased over-the-counter in drug stores — usually in the same section where antiseptics are shelved. Sporocidin not only kills mold but also has a residual effect that will prevent the mold from returning, according to Bean.

When cleaning up mold, it's advisable to wear protective clothing (long pants and long-sleeved shirt), goggles, a respirator and gloves because cleaning up mold releases spores into the air, according to Paul Krantz, executive editor of BHG.com (Better Homes and Gardens online). Small areas of mold measuring no more than 3-by-3 feet can usually be cleaned up safely by homeowners, but larger mold problems need to be addressed by professionals Krantz advised.

Some mold experts advise using paint that contains mildicide to prevent mold, but, Bean says, there's no scientific evidence that these paints are a guarantee against mold over time.

Michael Kuhn, director of field services for HouseMaster, a leading home inspection company, suggests the following measures to prevent or check for mold:

1. Install proper attic ventilation, such as soffit vents, to

increase airflow and decrease humidity in the attic (this will also extend the life of your roof).

2. Direct venting (including dryer vents) to the outside and not to an interior area, such as an attic or garage. Install bathroom exhaust fans in rooms with or without exterior windows to decrease humidity. Bathrooms and laundry areas that are not ventilated or poorly ventilated encourage the growth of mold and mildew.

3. Shut off offending appliances at first signs of condensation on windows or other surfaces. Check venting systems to ensure all potentially harmful flue gas exhausts to the exterior. Humidifiers and improperly vented fuel-burning appliances can raise the relative humidity in a room.

4. Use dehumidifiers and air conditioning to draw moisture out of the air, especially in hot, humid areas. To be sure these appliances don't themselves become sources of biological pollutants, clean or change the air conditioner filter to prevent dirt and mold buildup.

5. Inspect and clean major systems, such as furnaces, heat pumps and central air conditioners, before seasonal use.

6. Be aware of hazards of synthetic stucco siding: In the last 10 years, more and more builders have used a synthetic stucco or Dryvit product known as EIFS (Exterior Insulation and Finish System). If the material is not applied properly,

# Tile can add warmth, beauty and durability to your home

BY PAUL L. HUARD

Copley News Service

When you want real beauty inside or outside of your home, all you have to do is lay it on.

Tile, that is. Whether plain white or as colorful as a peacock's tail, one of history's oldest and most important crafts is always a source of new ideas.

Throughout civilization, architects and builders have chosen tile for its beauty, versatility and durability. It's been on the inside of palaces and mansions for centuries—and not just in the washroom.

"What can set off a room more dramatically than tile?" said Edward Lipinski, author of the New York Times "Home Clinic" and of "Tiling: The Installation Handbook" (Sterling Publishing Co., \$17.95). "Tile goes on floors, of course, but up walls, around windows and doors—wherever ceramics can go, including some places you haven't thought about."

Tile is fire-resistant and rock hard. Artistic and durable, it has been proven to withstand the normal wear and tear of centuries.

And it's tough enough to withstand foot traffic on "great room" floors and busy patios, and even the

flames of an evening fire as the heat radiates from the hearth.

Looking for some ideas on how to use tile? Consider the following.

The level of complexity involved in tile work varies from laying a simple counter to installing an ornate home entryway.

As with all improvement or construction projects, prices vary.

Professionals say that the factors influencing the cost of every project include labor, availability of materials, the condition of the existing structure and the wishes of the client. Contact the craftsman and ask for an assessment of your plans and an estimate of its cost.

If you plan to do the work yourself, estimate the cost not only of supplies, but your own time and whether you can actually complete the project on your own.

If you are a dedicated do-it-yourselfer, Lipinski recommends the following.

- Get a good set of tools. They are essential to doing a first-class installation job.
- Check the surfaces you plane to tile (floors, walls, pillars, etc.) and determine that they are flat, plumb or level (depending on the job).
- Learn the basic skill of

aligning the tiles correctly as you apply them. It's a fairly easy skill to master and it will create professional-looking results.

He covers other details of performing beautiful tile work in his book.

### The entry way

Tile can be used to make a stunning impression with pillars or columns that frame the main door to the home.

Pillars can be made of various materials. But given the right conditions, tile can cover the pillars.

The entryway walls can also be tiled. This is particularly popular in the American Southwest.

Whatever the materials used, the pillars or columns can be constructed so exterior lights are mounted for entryway illumination.

### Floors and walls

People are spending more and more time and attention to making their homes look beautiful, so why stop

at the floor?

Bob Fazio, owner of Bob Fazio Tile Co., Rogue River, Ore., said porcelain tile is a current favorite with remodelers. It's used as flooring, wall covering and as accents embedded in floor- and wall-base materials.

Porcelain tile has the characteristics that make fine china so attractive. It comes in high-gloss colors or vibrant patterns, is light and thin but very strong and helps enhance the sense of spacious luxury many homeowners seek.

The tile can be either the familiar smooth and glossy kind, or more rugged in character with embossing or rough surfaces.

And forget white as the only choice, Fazio said. Earth tones are the new staple, but he just completed a job where he mixed gray, blue and rust tiles of different sizes on walls and the floor.

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