

Mould: A Growing Issue

Education around the risk of mould in homes and businesses is critical for prevention and early identification. Whilst occupant lifestyle is often a contributory factor, it is not always the main cause.

The key lessons for landlords are around both the causes of mould and the importance of identifying and addressing defects and their causes quickly. The golden rule with mould is that prompt action is required to stop spread and subsequent spore dispersal. You cannot just paint over mould, it is crucial that the root cause is dealt with correctly.

Whilst environmental conditions, particularly around tenant lifestyle and condensation, are often the focus, in truth, other factors and differing forms of construction are prone to mould risk due to their structural design and material characteristics. For example, buildings from the 1960s and 1970s, which were largely concrete framed, with limited insulation properties, are often exacerbated by cold bridging. More recently, modern methods of construction have resulted in metal framed partition walling on concrete slabs, increased levels of insulation, plumbing and heating services within floors and voids, with reduced ventilation. These environmental conditions have an impact on controlling the mould risk.

Mould can also be a useful indicator of an ongoing escape/ingress of water, improper refurbishment or insufficient mitigation and drying following an insured event.

Landlords therefore need to be mindful that where there is evidence of mould, they should seek the advice of a competent chartered building surveyor or mitigation specialist to ensure that any building defects are addressed, and the environmental conditions and performance of buildings are functioning correctly.



In the pictured examples, minor surface growth was evident and, in both examples, overpainted. Further investigations into both cases subsequently identified significant growth on the backs of plasterboard and ongoing leaks.

Perfect Conditions for Mould

Whilst investigations to the root cause are ongoing, to understand how to successfully mitigate following water damage and inhibit mould growth, we need to understand what causes the spread. Factors to consider include:

- Food source: Mould is fed by breaking down and absorbing certain organic compounds, typically this is either wood or paper products although can extend to a number of organic food sources.
- Moisture: Mould thrives within damp, humid and wet conditions with growth occurring where humidity exceeds 65%.
- Temperature: Most rapid growth occurs within the temperature range of 20°C to 35°C but is possible between the ranges of 0°C to 50°C.
- Absence of airflow: Whilst mould requires oxygen, it prefers a stagnant atmosphere.
- Absence of natural light: Unlike plants, mould is not photosynthetic and does not require light to create energy. Sunlight can inhibit or kill mould growth, so it prefers a dark environment.

Preventing Mould Growth

Whilst every loss comes with its own unique circumstances and challenges, there are several steps typically adopted to mitigate and prevent mould growth:

1. Segregation of the affected area and installation of suitable air scrubbing to control spore release.

2. Early identification and removal of materials, subject to later replacement, under controlled conditions. These can include building materials and contents deemed as being unrecoverable.
3. Removal of any physical moisture or contaminants by most practical method.
4. Application of suitable anti-microbial/biocide solutions to affected surfaces via low pressure or task specific spraying apparatus.
5. Early installation of drying systems to reduce humidity, ideally to less than 55%. Humidistat controlled extraction fans can assist greatly in managing ongoing conditions.
6. Introduction of airflow and natural light where possible.
7. Removal of surface finishes acting as a vapour barrier.

Strip out, professional mould remediation and subsequent analysis works are significantly more disruptive and costly than timely investigation and mitigation actions undertaken by suitably trained and competent persons. Given the amount of damage that can be caused by mould growth and the potential effects to occupier health, prevention really is better than the cure.



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