

CASE STUDY: MULTIPLE TENANTS MOISTURE/MOLD INSPECTION

Project Description: Odor Investigation - Senior Center

Scope of Services: AET was contracted by a Senior Center to evaluate the source of musty or sewer-like odors in their rear administrative offices. The facility consists of a 1 story on-slab structure with 3 tenants; a Senior Center, a hair salon and a restaurant. HVAC to the Senior Center is provided by a roof-top forced air unit. AET's IAQ professional was accompanied by a representative of the County Health Department.

AET's Investigative Approach/Tools:

1. ***Visual Inspection (rule out mold/water damage)...*** Interior finishes in the Senior Center consisted of carpeted floors, sheet rock walls and lay-in ceiling tiles. No visible mold or moisture impact was noted (except a single ceiling tile in the front dining area). No abnormalities (unusual temperature differentials) indicative of moisture intrusion were identified by thermographic imaging using an infrared (IR) camera or moisture meter testing.
2. ***Odor Detection/Interviews...*** As reported by building occupants, AET's IAQ professional observed a faint but pungent sewer-like odor in the rear office area. A small section of sheetrock was cut-out from the wall near the baseboard level. A strong pungent sewer gas odor was immediately released. No visible mold growth or moisture impact was noted on the sheetrock cut-out.
3. ***Find the real odor source...*** The odor complaint location was found to be contiguous to the location of a walk-in freezer in the adjacent restaurant tenant. The tenants were separated by a sheetrock demising wall.

CONCLUSION: In this case, an intrusive wall inspection was necessary to find the odor source. Visual inspection, moisture measurement testing, infrared camera evaluation and mold spore air quality sampling were inconclusive.

The building owner and restaurant tenant were notified that repairs to the freezer including inspection of the tenant sewer system was required. Responsibility for repairs will be based on the tenant lease agreements. The Senior Center will not be occupied until repairs are completed due to the potential health implications to the building occupants.

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