



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS DECISION-MAKING - MOLD INSPECTIONS

I am in the process of purchasing a commercial property, which has been vacant for several years, and plan to convert the property into apartments. There appears to be black mold on interior finishes such as the walls. What should I do?

**MOLD is UBIQUITOUS:** Mold can be found almost anywhere; it can grow on any organic substance, as long as moisture and oxygen are present. Molds grow on wood, paper, carpet, foods and insulation. Molds reproduce by making spores that cannot be seen by the human eye. Mold spores enter buildings through outdoor air and/or attach to building occupants. When mold spores land on a damp spot indoors, they can begin growing and digesting whatever they are growing on in order to survive.

**MOLD in VACANT BUILDINGS:** Closed up buildings represent the ultimate breeding ground for mold growth. Vacant buildings can have roof leaks, leaking or broken windows, exterior drainage problems and other sources of moisture infiltration. Further, the HVAC system servicing the building is usually inoperable, resulting in uncontrolled humidity. Mold growth is controlled indoors by controlling moisture.

**BLACK MOLD:** Headlines frequently warn about toxic black mold. In-fact, mold can develop into growths of many decorative colors such as pink, purple and orange. The color of the mold depends on what building materials the mold is digesting as its food source. The toxicity of the mold is irrelevant to its color; the same mold can manifest itself into many different colors. Toxic black mold often refers to *Stachybotrys*. *Stachybotrys* is a relatively slow growing mold which requires prolonged moisture impact and grows best indoors on drywall, paper or wood products. *Stachybotrys* reported health effects are exacerbated by the mycotoxins it produces.

### **MOLD INSPECTION: What to look for (vacant buildings)?**

- Staining or discolorations on interior walls, ceilings and around windows
- Surface efflorescence on concrete block walls
- Water marks (dry or wet) on ceiling tiles, walls and floors
- Leaking or condensating pipes including those in pipe chases or utility tunnels
- Musty odors
- Damp carpets
- Standing water on roof or around foundation
- Clogged gutters; Water runoff not diverted away from building

In occupied buildings, the building occupants including the maintenance staff may prove the best source of knowledge regarding both current/past mold/water damage issues. Additional Inspection criteria for occupied areas include:

- Blockage/odor sources near fresh air intakes
- Wall paper on exterior walls
- Clogged condensate drains or growth in HVAC units

In order to evaluate the extent of a mold problem, you must have the building/surfaces professionally tested. Bulk, wipe or tape lift samples should be taken of the suspect mold growth to confirm if mold is present and what type of mold. Moisture measurement testing should also be performed to determine if building surfaces are wet (indicative of an active water leak) or exhibit staining but are dry (indicative of a past water infiltration episode).

**CONCLUSION:** Planning and budgeting considerations for buildings which will be renovated (not demolished) containing mold is essential. This plan must begin with the identification/ correction of the sources of water infiltration/leakage. Mold will continue to grow until the source of moisture is rectified. Mold remediation procedures are based on the extent (total surface area) of mold growth, not the type of mold present. The total surface area dictates the recommended use of EPA specific engineering control measures for remediation activities. Incorporate the cost of fixing the sources of water infiltration, mold remediation and construction build-back into your property purchase negotiations.

**Note:** *Identification and evaluation of mold is not a recognized environmental condition (REC) in a Standard ASTM Phase I Environmental Site Assessment. Always ask your environmental consultant to evaluate mold and water damage in your Phase I.*

When you need professional help or advice email Alan Sutherland, CIH, CHMM at [a.sutherland@aetinc.biz](mailto:a.sutherland@aetinc.biz) or call 610-891-0114. We provide nationwide services; phone consultations are free. Check out the full range of environmental contracting/consulting services on our website [www.aetinc.biz](http://www.aetinc.biz). Additional technical information regarding mold is found on **AET's 5 Part Alert Series** and other **FAQ's** on our Website.