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Recovery News

CLEANING UP MOLD—HOW TO GET RID OF IT

Editors: This release serves as a sidebar to FEMA's Sept. 18 News Release NR-029, "Mold May Be Present From New Jersey Flooding."

NEPTUNE, N.J. — Steps can be taken to combat mold growth and its potential to cause serious health problems as well as structural damage to homes, according to officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management.

Some items must be removed; others can be cleaned. Here are some tips:

- Control the moisture problem. The source of the water must be identified and corrected.
- Porous materials with extensive mold growth should be discarded (e.g., drywall, carpeting, paper, and ceiling tiles). For heirloom rugs and hardwood furniture, contact a professional cleaner. Most furniture today is made of composite materials, which must be discarded.
- Water can seep up higher than the visible water line. The best practice is to remove the wall board at least two feet above the water line. Check local building codes for specific guidance.
- Appliances such as refrigerators, freezers, cooking stoves, dishwashers, hot water heaters, washing machines and dryers contain insulation, which may harbor mold spores without visible evidence and should be discarded.
- Heating and air conditioning filters need to be changed and the system ductwork should be inspected by a professional. Unless the system is away from the flooded area and hasn't been operated, it may have to be replaced.
- Non-porous surfaces, including glass, ceramic, metal and plastic, may be cleaned. A combination of household bleach and soap or detergent may be used to wash down walls, floors and other mold-contaminated areas. Follow directions on containers and take particular note of warnings. Wear rubber gloves, protective clothing and a tight-fitting face mask when working around mold. **Never mix chlorine liquids and ammonia.**

- Mold growing on hard surfaces (such as wood and concrete) can be cleaned. Small areas can be scrubbed with a cleaning rag wetted with diluted detergent. Rubber gloves and a dust mask are recommended for jobs other than routine cleaning. For a large mold problem, or if you are highly sensitive to mold, an experienced professional should do the work.
- In areas where it is impractical to eliminate the moisture source, a 10 percent bleach solution can be used to keep mold growth under control. In areas that can be kept dry, bleach is not necessary, as mold cannot grow in the absence of moisture. When using bleach, ensure that enough fresh air is available because bleach may cause eye, nose, or throat irritation.
- Continue to monitor the area for new mold growth and signs of moisture. This may indicate the need for further repairs or material removal.

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