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DEALING WITH MOLD

Clean and Dry Out Your Home as Soon as Possible

FRAMINGHAM, MA - If a home has water damage from the flooding, mold could develop in as short of a time as 24 to 48 hours of water exposure and may continue to grow until steps are taken to thoroughly dry out the premises and eliminate the source of moisture. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that mold can be recognized by wall and ceiling discoloration, and a musty, earthy odor.

Although mold is a naturally existing substance, it can be harmful to humans. When airborne mold spores are present in large quantities, they can cause allergic reactions, asthma episodes, infections, and other respiratory problems**.** Continued exposure to mold may result in nasal or sinus congestion, eye, nose, or throat irritations, and adverse effects to the nervous system.

Individuals who are at the greatest risk are infants and children, the elderly, those with immune-compromised related diseases, pregnant women, and those with existing respiratory conditions. Anyone falling into these categories should consult a physician if they are experiencing health problems.

Follow these six steps to dry your home and combat health problems associated with mold:

- If the humidity outside is lower than indoors, open up the house, and if the weather permits, open all the doors and windows to exchange the moist indoor air for drier outdoor air. If you have a thermometer with a humidity gauge, you can monitor the indoor and outdoor humidity. On the other hand, when temperatures drop at night, an open home is warmer and will draw moisture indoors. At night and other times when the humidity is higher outdoors, close up the house.
- Remove all wet furniture, contents and carpets or rugs. If you decide to keep them, they must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- Open closet and cabinet doors to remove drawers to allow air circulation. Drawers may stick because of swelling. Do not try to force them. Speed up the drying process by opening the back of the cabinet to let the air circulate. You will probably be able to remove the drawers as the cabinet dries out.

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- Using fans can help move the air and dry out the home. They will blow out dirty air that might contain contaminants from sediment in the ductwork. Be sure to clean or hose out any ducts. Do not use central air conditioning or the furnace blower if the ducts were under water.
- Running dehumidifiers and window air conditioners will reduce the moisture, especially in closed up areas.
- Use desiccants (materials that absorb moisture) such as silica gel, which are very useful in drying closets or other enclosed areas where air cannot move through. These types of materials may be purchased at hardware stores or home and garden stores.

If mold becomes an issue in your household, here are some of the ways to clean it out:

- Most household cleaners will be good enough to cleanse walls and wood furniture. An alternative is a mixture of ¼ cup of liquid chlorine bleach for every gallon of water.
- Be aware that wallpaper paste can harbor mold, and therefore wall coverings may have to be removed and replaced.
- After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with a disinfectant to kill the germs and odors left by the floodwaters.
- Be careful of fumes; wear rubber gloves and a dust mask. Read any safety instructions in order to properly handle cleaning materials.

Drying your home could take several weeks. While it may seem that your house is safe from mold, your health may still be at risk because of the lingering effects of mold. When water damage infiltrates a structure, the long lasting effects can be detrimental to the composition of the building. If you believe that your health has been affected by exposure to mold, you should contact your physician and have your house checked.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA and Winter & Flooding Preparedness, go to www.mass.gov/mema. Follow MEMA updates on Facebook and Twitter.

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