

# Preventing Damage From Mold

## “Tips for Homeowners”

*Following a flood, conditions in your home may be ripe for an outbreak of mold, one of the most serious sources of damage to your family possessions. The following tips are offered to help you control mold after flooding occurs.*

### **WHAT IS MOLD?**

Mold, a common term for fungus, attacks organic materials such as paper, books, cloth, photographs and leather. Mold grows from spores, which are everywhere in our environment. Usually these spores are inactive, but they will germinate when the relative humidity exceeds 70 percent. Temperatures above 65 degrees increase the likelihood of mold growth.

### **WHAT DOES MOLD LOOK LIKE?**

Active mold growth is slimy or fuzzy and is usually green, black, orange or purple. Inactive mold is dry and powdery and may be white. In early stages, the mold may look like a fine web; in full bloom it looks bushy. Mold spores spread easily; they are carried by air currents, pets and people.

### **WHAT HARM CAN MOLD DO?**

Active mold “digests” organic materials such as cloth book covers or the cellulose that composes paper. It can also make permanent stains.

### **IS MOLD DANGEROUS TO HUMANS?**

Mold can be hazardous to people with respiratory problems. Only a few species are toxic, but many can cause allergic reactions or irritate skin. If you handle moldy materials, work outdoors when possible and wear protective clothing, a respirator mask with filter, disposable plastic gloves and clothing you can wash in very hot water or discard. If you are concerned about the toxicity of the mold, your local hospital can refer you to a mycologist.

### **HOW CAN I STOP MOLD FROM SPREADING?**

1. Work Fast. Under the right conditions, mold can spread and grow quickly.
2. Lower the humidity and temperature. Open the windows if outside humidity is lower than inside; otherwise, use air conditioning. Install dehumidifiers.

3. Isolate any moldy objects. Seal moldy trash in plastic bags and remove them immediately. Objects you can save should be dried or frozen as soon as possible. Freezing inactivates mold.
4. Keep the area clean. Mold may remain on shelves and in cupboards where valuables are kept. Clean the surfaces with a disinfectant such as Lysol and then increase air circulation in the room. Use fans only after moldy objects are removed and all display and storage areas are clean.

## **HOW CAN I SAVE MOLDY POSSESSIONS?**

1. Air dry them away from other objects. Spread out papers, stand books on end and fan the pages open. Use blotting materials like clean towels or absorbent paper between layers of cloth and paper. Increase air circulation with a fan, but don't aim the fan directly at the objects.
2. If you can't dry the objects quickly or you have a large quantity, you can freeze books, documents and small textiles until conditions are right to dry them. Do not freeze photographs that have mold on them.
3. Although ultraviolet light can be damaging, brief exposure to sunlight can stop mold growth and aid drying. Exposure should not exceed 30 minutes.
4. Clean the mold only after it is dry and inactive. Very gently wipe or brush away the mold residue. Work outdoors if possible and always wear protective clothing and a respirator.
5. Avoid harsh cleaning products and bleach; they can ruin objects. Never vacuum fragile items. Use a household vacuum cleaner outdoors, since the exhaust will spread mold spores.
6. Be sure display and storage areas are free of mold before you return any clean object to its proper place. Reinspect the objects from time to time for any new mold growth.