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Disaster News

MOLD IS A GROWING PROBLEM IN FLOOD-DAMAGED WASHINGTON HOMES

OLYMPIA — If your home was affected in the recent flooding it could be harboring mold.

"Mold can be a significant problem after flooding, and proper cleanup is critical to ensure that it does not affect you or your family's health," said Laura White, public health advisor with the Washington State Department of Health's Division of Environmental Health.

Care must be taken to clean and completely dry any areas of the home that have gotten wet from floodwaters to prevent structural damage and adverse health effects from mold.

"People are anxious to get on with their lives after a flood, but if you had flood waters in your home take the time to clean thoroughly so problems don't arise later that affect your home or your health," Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Coordinating Officer Willie Nunn said.

Mold and Health Concerns

Mold growth is a common occurrence in flood-damaged homes and damp environments. Mold could become a problem in your home if there is enough moisture available to allow mold to thrive and multiply. Dampness in basements, walls, carpets, and wood provides an environment for mold to flourish.

Mold is made up of simple microscopic organisms that are found virtually everywhere. It can often be seen in the form of discoloration, ranging from white to orange and from green to brown and black, and gives off a musty or earthy smell.

Exposure to mold can cause health problems. Infants, children, immune-compromised patients, pregnant women, individuals with existing respiratory conditions, (allergies, multiple chemical sensitivity, and asthma) and the elderly appear to be at higher risks for adverse health effects from mold.

Health symptoms known to be associated with exposure to mold include nose and throat irritation, wheeze, cough, asthma attacks in individuals who have asthma, and lower respiratory tract infections (in children). People with pre-existing respiratory conditions may also be susceptible to more serious lung infections.

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Cleanup tips

- Throw out things that can't be washed and disinfected (mattresses, carpeting, rugs, carpet padding, upholstered furniture, cosmetics, stuffed animals, baby toys, pillows, foam-rubber items, books, wall coverings, and most paper products, for example).
- Remove wet or damaged materials and allow exposed surfaces to dry thoroughly before replacing drywall, insulation and floor coverings that have come in contact with sewage or flood waters.
- Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces (such as flooring, concrete, molding, wood and metal furniture, countertops, appliances, sinks and other plumbing fixtures).
- Mold can grow on any surface, including walls, ceilings, carpets, and paints so it may take a variety of cleaning approaches. Bleach and soap with water will clean most surfaces.
- If a moldy smell can be detected, there is mold around. After cleaning visibly moldy areas, allow them to dry.

Undamaged commercial canned food that doesn't have extensive rusting can be cleaned. Remove labels, wash the can with a scrub brush and detergent, and then rinse in clean water. The cans should be sanitized by swabbing or dipping in bleach solution for 15 minutes, and then air dried. Home canned foods; food packaged in paper, cardboard, or containers with screw top lids or flip tops; and unpackaged foods such as fruit, potatoes, and squash should be thrown away.

After handling items that have been in contact with floodwater or sewage during the cleanup, wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected — especially when preparing food. Wash contaminated clothes in hot water and detergent — separate from uncontaminated items.

Additional information on mold and mold cleanup can be found on these Web sites:

- The Washington Department of Health provides a comprehensive description of how to clean and disinfect a mold-damaged home on its environmental health web page. For more information, connect to http://www.emd.wa.gov/preparedness/FloodSafe_HowTo.shtml and http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/Floods/flood_debris.html.
- For a printable brochure on mold prevention and cleanup, visit FEMA's recovery web pages at http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rebuild/recover/fema_mold_brochure_english.pdf.

For more information about Washington recovery, please visit www.disasterassistance.gov, www.floodsmart.gov, www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance/, and <http://www.emd.wa.gov/>.

FEMA leads and supports the nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the nation from all hazards including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters.

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FEMA's temporary housing assistance and grants for public transportation expenses, medical and dental expenses, and funeral and burial expenses do not require individuals to apply for an SBA loan. However, applicants who receive SBA loan applications must submit them to SBA loan officers to be eligible for assistance that covers personal property, vehicle repair or replacement, and moving and storage expenses.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) is the federal government's primary source of money for the long-term rebuilding of disaster-damaged private property. SBA helps homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes, and private nonprofit organizations fund repairs or rebuilding efforts, and cover the cost of replacing lost or disaster-damaged personal property. These disaster loans cover uninsured and uncompensated losses and do not duplicate benefits of other agencies or organizations. For information about SBA programs, applicants may call 1-800-659-2955 (TTY 1-800-877-8339). Homeowners, renters and business owners with questions for the SBA should call the Customer Service Center at 1-800-659-2955 (TTY 1-800-877-8339). Homeowners, renters and business owners with questions for the SBA should call the Customer Service Center at 1-800-659-2955.

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