



SAFETY TALKS:

Mold In The Workplace

Mold are fungi that are found everywhere – both indoors and outdoors, all year round. Concern about indoor exposure to mold has increased along with public awareness that exposure to mold can cause a variety of adverse health effects. There are many thousands of species of mold and most, if not all mold found indoors comes from outdoor sources. For those people who are affected by mold exposures there can be a wide variation in how they react. People at greatest risk of health effects are individuals with allergies, asthma, sinusitis, or other respiratory conditions, as well as infants and children, elderly people, and pregnant women. In addition, individuals with a weakened immune system are at risk.

Mold affects everyone differently, however. Therefore, there are no specific OSHA standards for mold. However, that doesn't mean that the employer doesn't have to address mold in the workplace. 29 CFR 1910/141(a) (3) requires employers to maintain all places of employment clean to the extent that the nature of the work allows. Additionally, Section 5(a)(1) of the OSHA Act requires each employer to "furnish to each of his employees, employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm."

Health Effects of Mold Exposure

- Runny nose
- Eye irritation
- Cough/congestion
- Sneezing
- Skin rash
- Aggravation of asthma

How to Recognize Mold

- Sight – Usually appear as colored woolly mats.
- Smell – Often produce a foul, musty, earthy smell.

Indoor air quality testing may also be conducted by an industrial hygienist or qualified testing lab to identify the severity and types of molds present in the workplace.

Clean up of Small Areas

Cleaning up even small areas of mold damage requires special precautions. It's important for workers to use approved respiratory protection, hand/eye protection (non-vented goggles), wear long gloves made of material that will protect from chemicals used for surface cleaning, and wear protective clothing to prevent contamination and skin contact with mold and chemicals. Set up a decontamination area. Workers should not eat, drink, or smoke in work areas, and should avoid breathing dusts. Discard all water/mold damaged materials; discard mold damaged materials in plastic bags; discard all porous items that have been wet more than 48 hours. Disinfect surfaces with 1/2 cup household bleach in 1 gallon of water. **CAUTION: Do not mix bleach with cleaning products that contain ammonia.** After working, workers should wash thoroughly, including hair, scalp, and nails.

For more information on mold in the workplace, visit OSHA's website at <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/molds/> or the Centers For Disease Control <https://www.cdc.gov/mold/default.htm>