



# Build It Back Green

## *Mold Control Tips*

### **OVERVIEW**

Mold in a home is not only unsightly and potentially damaging to building materials, but it can also be dangerous to human health. As described by the LSU AgCenter, mold can trigger allergic reactions and asthma attacks, it can weaken the immune system, and some types can even create toxins that are dangerous to human health. Mold problems are linked to moisture problems; **controlling moisture in the home is key to controlling mold.** Although mold is an issue that most households in the New Orleans area face, there are a few steps that can be taken to prevent, remove, and control mold in your home.

### **TIPS FOR MOLD PREVENTION**

- Mold grows in humid, moist environments. Ideally, the relative humidity (RH) in your home should be around 40% to 60%. As reported by the LSU AgCenter, maintaining the relative humidity in your home below 70% will prevent surface mold. A hygrometer, a device that measures relative humidity, can be purchased for less than \$10 at a home improvement or electronics store.
- There are a few ways to maintain the relative humidity in your home below 70% and closer to the goal of 40% to 60% RH.
  - The first step is to make sure your home has a tight envelope. Weatherization of a home, including caulking, sealing, weatherstripping, and insulating, will not only cut back on electricity bills, but it will also allow you to better control the humidity in your home.
  - The second step is to make sure your air conditioner is appropriate for your home's needs. A properly sized air conditioning system with latent capacity (the ability to remove moisture) can help reduce humidity in the home. A Manual J calculation performed by a professional can help determine if your HVAC unit is properly sized.
  - The third step is to make sure your home is properly ventilated. The LSU AgCenter recommends mechanical ventilation systems for all houses. This will allow fresh air into your home in a controlled manner.
  - A dehumidifier is another option. There are several Energy Star rated models that can help remove moisture from the air.

- Another point to remember is that mold begins to grow in your home if materials are wet for 2 to 3 days. In order to prevent the growth of mold, make sure that the wet materials will dry within a couple days or completely remove the materials as soon as possible to prevent growth. If you home floods at some point in the future, take photographs for insurance purposes first, then remove the damaged materials to prevent the accumulation of mold in your home.
- If you are in the process of building or rebuilding, use materials that can withstand moisture and flooding, thus preventing mold. Insulation types such as rigid foam board and closed cell foam spray do not absorb water. Using paperless drywall will remove a potential nutrient source for mold, and products such as borate treated wood will resist mold.
- Make sure that rainwater flows away from your foundation. A build up, or pooling of water under your home will significantly increase the chance of moisture problems in the home.

### ***TIPS FOR MOLD REMOVAL AND CONTROL***

- If you need to remove mold in large quantities, such as in a flooded home, there are more detailed procedures to be found at the LSU AgCenter website ([http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/family\\_home/home](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/family_home/home)) or the Environmental Protection Agency website (<http://www.epa.gov/mold>). For removing smaller amounts of mold in your home, however, there are a few steps that you can take.
- Before beginning clean up of a mold problem, fix the moisture problem that causes it. Whether it is a plumbing leak, roof leak, humidity problem, or other issue, repair the problem so that mold does not repeatedly grow back.
- After taking care of the moisture problem, seal off the moldy area from the rest of the house and ventilate it to the outdoors. Mold releases spores, tiny mold cells that act like seeds, that can potentially spread mold and possibly be harmful to breathe in. Therefore, cover or place in a trash bag any moldy materials that you may remove from the area.
- After removing any moldy materials, clean the surfaces. Scrub all contaminated areas with stiff brush, water, and a phosphate free and chlorine free soap or cleaner. Afterwards thoroughly rinse the area.
- Essential to the process is drying wet materials after the cleaning process. Use your a/c, heater, dehumidifier, windows, or whatever means you have available to dry the wet material. Remember, it only takes 2 to 3 days for mold to begin to form. Try to dry out the area as soon as possible.