Mold: Important Safety Precautions During Salvage Operations

Mold can be a serious health hazard. Even if the type of mold you are dealing with is not toxic, some people can develop severe allergies to non-toxic molds as a result of prolonged or repeated mold exposure. Always take precautions to limit your exposure. Keep as much skin covered as possible, and avoid touching face, eyes, ears, nose, or mouth while working with mold.

Wear the appropriate PPE at all times:

- Lab coat, coveralls, or Tyvek suit
- Goggles or other protective eyewear, preferably unventilated
- N95 or N100 disposable respirator
- Latex or nitrile gloves

Practice safe handling guidelines:

- Isolate
  - Polypropylene or polyethylene baggies (or wrap in plastic/tape seams).
    - Temporary measure only, can make mold growth worse.
  - If outbreak is too extensive for items to be moved, seal the entire area using polyethylene sheeting. Seal off from ventilation to other building areas if possible.
- Inactivate
  - Freeze infested materials until mold is dormant (within 24 hours).
  - Otherwise, move materials to conditions which are <45% RH and <65º F (may take longer for mold to go dormant). If materials cannot be moved, the environmental control of the quarantined area must be the highest priority.
- HEPA vacuum
  - Never attempt to vacuum active mold (when it is soft, fuzzy, and smeary).
  - Vacuum mold after it has gone dormant and dried out.
- Clean storage areas and equipment
  - Wipe storage surfaces with a Lysol-type fungicide according to manufacturer directions.
  - Clean equipment (such as vacuum parts) with a 1:1 solution of water and ethanol.
    - *Note:* ethanol is a carcinogen. Take appropriate precautions during use and dispose of extra solution appropriately.
- In the case of an extensive or toxic mold outbreak, call in professionals trained in the proper use of fungicides.

Additional notes:

- Do *not* return materials to the same environmental conditions which allowed the mold outbreak to occur in the first place.
- Lower the temperature, and use portable dehumidifiers and silica gels in the short term to lower humidity if HVAC controls cannot immediately be restored to recommended conditions (<65% RH and <70º F.)
- Avoid using fans during an active mold outbreak, as this will spread mold spores.
- Make sure HEPA filters are installed in the building’s HVAC system.
Soot, Mud, and Mold: Beyond the Basics of Salvaging Archives Collections  
Melissa Tedone, Whitney Baker, and Hilary Seo  
MAC 2014

**Resources**


