

Reduce Your Exposure to Mold Losses

Mold can be defined as a growth of minute fungi forming on vegetable or animal matter, commonly as a downy or furry coating, and associated with decay or dampness. Growth of mold may begin with or become exacerbated by water damage that is inadequately repaired. Increasingly, airtight building construction (for purposes of improving energy efficiency) and the recirculation of contaminated air can contribute to the growth of mold as well.

Mold claim costs have increased dramatically over the years. According to the Insurance Information Institute, the typical mold claim costs between \$15,000 and \$30,000, compared to only \$3,000 to \$4,000 for an average homeowners claim. Part of this reason is the additional living expenses component of the claim. Frequently, a home owner must temporarily move out of the home due to necessary and major remediation work.

Active mold is fuzzy, velvety, or slimy, and is orange, green, black, brown, pink, or purple in color. If you suspect you have a mold problem in your home, here are some tips to consider.

- Check the inside and outside of the dwelling for leaks and any visual evidence of contaminants since plumbing leaks are a primary cause of mold in homes. This task includes investigating the attic and basement to closely check for dampness and discoloration. It is important that the source of the leak be repaired as quickly as possible.
- If there is a slight amount of mold, used a detergent solution to remove it. Wear a mask, safety goggles, and rubber gloves while performing this task.
- For larger amounts of mold or resistant mold, contact a qualified specialist in the area of mold remediation.
- For moderate or major damage to property, also contact your insurance agent.
- To mold-proof your home, dehumidify your basement during the warm months. Eliminate standing water, and frequently clean and replace furnace filters.
- Regularly check the condition of your roof and exterior finish for any places where water might enter your home.

If mold is suspected of causing an illness, consider the following recommendations.

- Contacting an environmental consultant may be necessary. You should ascertain the credentials of this consultant and contact the references provided. In addition, it is wise to select a consultant who does not perform the actual remediation work or have an interest in a company that does.
- If symptoms persist, a physician who specializes in occupational and environmental medicine (rather than a family practitioner) should be consulted. The specialist is often able to more easily isolate the cause.

Get more [personal lines insurance and risk management](#) tips and ideas from IRMI.

[International Risk Management Institute, Inc., September 2011](#)