

# Mold Prevention and Risk Management During the Building Process



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The media and recent litigation cases have amplified fears of the possible unknown health effects associated with mold exposure. These fears along with record financial settlements have increased the builder's exposure to mold loss risk.

Mold loss risk can be managed and greatly reduced through a series of checks and balances. Most mold losses can be prevented by putting protocols in place and monitoring them. This can be accomplished by educating your employees and subcontractors, thus helping them to realize how important it is to keep this possibly, very costly problem from occurring. Today's economy, with some building materials

in short supply, material price increases and higher impact fees, has builders looking for better ways to manage their businesses. Some forward thinking builders are helping to accomplish this by better managing their building practices and procedures, thus lowering their exposure and reducing their risk.

Mold prevention should start on the drawing board with architects keeping in mind areas that are prone to water intrusion and taking precautions to safeguard them. Windows and doors can often be protected by simply modifying overhangs or placement. The next step is timely ordering, inspection upon delivery and protection of building materials during storage and through the installation process. Many times I have seen trusses, lumber, drywall and a host of

other building materials delivered and accepted at sites with no monitoring what-so-ever. Most superintendents are under the gun to meet closing dates and are afraid to compromise deadlines by not accepting questionable materials. A very smart builder once told me that if you refuse to accept imperfect materials a few times, the supplier would find someone else to send them to instead of you.

Daily inspections should be established and conducted by a designated employee to insure that no overnight or previously undetected moisture issues have occurred. Predetermined inspections should also be put in place. A good time for a proactive inspection is post-mechanical pre-drywall and pre-stucco. At this time you should be looking at site drainage, roofs, plumbing, wall

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penetrations, venting, HVAC ducting, windows, doors, cladding, and waterproofing detail. You may want to enlist a third party inspector to perform this inspection as it is very important, should be unbiased and well documented. Deficiencies should be noted on this report and the person responsible for repairing these should sign off on them as they are repaired. Photos can be a big help in this report in identifying items.

If water-damaged materials are found after installation they should be dealt with immediately. First the source of the water has to be identified and eliminated. Drying equipment should then be put in place, if possible. If drying is not an option, materials such as drywall and insulation should be removed and discarded. If the material has been moist for more than forty-eight hours, the potential for mold growth is significant and needs to be addressed. Mold damaged materials should be replaced if possible and

properly remediated if not. Remediation should be performed under accepted guidelines and by properly trained personnel. When in doubt take it out. Believe me, this is the time to react. An unattended or improperly attended water issue can turn into a builder's nightmare after a homeowner closes and is occupying the home. It can escalate from you changing out some building materials during the construction process to a full-blown remediation job by an outside company brought in by the homeowner. At that point you have lost control and are left wide open to increase financial exposure.

After the deficiencies found at the post mechanical, pre-drywall pre-stucco inspection are corrected, daily inspections should continue to be conducted by your designated employee through the duration of the construction process. The next pre-determined inspection should be set up for approximately two weeks before

closing. This is an in-depth inspection that you may also want to call in a third party inspector. This inspection should include but not be limited to: visual water damage, sheathing, pressurized plumbing, icemakers, clothes washers, dishwashers, inside wall penetrations, outside wall penetrations, tile grout, tile caulking, drywall moisture content at windows and doors, windows and doors for perimeter and screw caulk, HVAC units, humidity testing, gutters, and irrigation. After the deficiencies found at this inspection are corrected and signed off, this report can be saved to prove due diligence on your part if a future situation does occur.

There are a lot of new and different ideas about how to handle mold in new construction. It is my opinion that through monitoring and inspections most mold problems can be avoided. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.