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RED FLAGS FOR MOLD

Mold is a great concern today. Home inspectors are not mold inspectors, but they should aware of situations that can create mold. I have run into a number of unique situations over the years that ended up causing a mold problem that you should be alert for.

The first situation is the cathedral ceiling that abuts within six inches of the roof sheathing. In these types of homes, typically a two-inch air space is supposedly left above the insulation and below the roof for air to circulate. Very often, for whatever reason air does not circulate, humidity from the house condenses in this space, saturating insulation and even causing the interior drywall ceiling to become saturated and fall down. This can often be a prime site for mold.

The second suspicious area occurs in tri-level houses. Sometimes builders run ductwork from furnaces under cement floors that are poured on top of gravel with no crawl space. Ductwork that is in contact with the ground underneath a cement floor can receive water from the ground. It's often an area of condensation and can create an area of moisture or water accumulation within the ductwork that is ripe for mold.

Leaking windows are one of the most common causes of mold. If the windows are not installed correctly, water and/or condensation can get in around the edges of the windows. Usually a moisture meter will detect water or moisture within the wall around the perimeter of the window. This too is a ripe area for mold breeding.

Basement repair contractors, when they are replacing interior drain tile, usually drill holes in the bottom course of blocks to allow any water in the block to drain into the new interior drain tiles. Most of the time these holes are drilled below the surface of the floor, so any moisture in the block drains directly into the interior drain tile beneath the surface of the floor.

Sometimes, however, the bottom course of block does not allow a hole to be drilled below the surface of the floor and holes are drilled above the surface of the floor.

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In these cases, a flat plastic shield is put up between the floor and the wall that covers the holes and allows any water in the block to drain out the block against the back of the plastic, running down the interior to the interior drain tile.

This situation can create a problem, as any dampness, wetness or mold inside the block can enter the air space in the basement if there is any negative air pressure. Additionally, moisture trapped between the plastic and the block wall keeps the block wall from drying out. This too can create a potential breeding ground for mold.

Home inspectors should make sure that bathroom vents don't just enter the ceiling or wall but properly ventilate the air to the outside. Our office has had cases where the vent goes into the attic or the wall and doesn't exit on the outside causing moist and warm air to be deposited to the attic or within the walls creating a prime place for mold to breed.

Attics with improper ventilation can also create mold breeding grounds. If the humid air in the house rises up and gets into the attic space, and the attic is not ventilated, it will condense in the attic in the wintertime. This can soak insulation and roof boards, again creating breeding place for mold. Sometimes attic spaces are difficult to view or get to, but should be checked out because improper attic ventilation is a serious problem.

Another suspicious situation is where a furnace and/ or an air conditioner is installed in the attic. Condensation, if not provided for, can drip down into the walls causing dampness and mold.

Leaking pipes can create breeding areas in places below where the pipe leaks. In houses that have two or three stories, plumbing features can leak for a period of time and drip down into the ceiling or wall space in lower floor. An effort should be made to look for signs of past seepage or leakage in order to determine whether there may be a problem with mold in areas where the plumbing has leaked.

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The home inspection should exclude mold inspections as one of the services you provide. Despite the fact that you exclude the mold inspection, you still may be responsible for the undiscovered defects that result in mold and hence liable for damages related to mold. That's why it's important to look for situations that may end up creating or contributing to a mold problem.