

Debunking Common Myths Regarding Mold: Leo Old (EnSafe) Arkansas Environmental Federation Presentation



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Leo Old undertook a presentation at the Arkansas Environmental Federation Convention titled:

Debunking Common Myths Regarding Mold ("Presentation")

Mr. Old is an Associate Principal with EnSafe in Memphis, Tennessee.

The Presentation addressed a number of issues related to mold such as the types, testing, and recommendations for remediating mold.

The importance of this issue is arguably due to fact that structural mold growth does not occur in a particular type of building or as a result of a certain use. Instead, the likelihood of significant mold growth is tied to conditions that can be present in almost any structure. It is therefore as likely to be found in a commercial structure as an industrial facility. Further, whether mold constitutes a threat to a structure occupants can involve difficult questions of causation.

The problem posed by mold in the transactional context is its tendency to generate uncertainty. Uncertainty may hinder the parties' efforts to assign values to relevant structures. As a result, some effort may be required to quantify the potential liabilities associated with a particular issue. This can be a transactional impediment in some circumstances.

Sampling, assessments, and/or remediation activities may be employed to delineate or achieve certain conditions. However, a party's reliance on such activities may depend upon their understanding of the various aspects of issues associated with mold. An enhanced understanding may enable parties to resolve mold issues. Familiarity with the techniques available to quantify mold impact is necessary.

Mr. Old's Presentation addressed what he described as a number of myths associated with mold.

The first myth:

Black mold is the deadliest type of mold (noting that the terms black mold and toxic mold are misleading, referencing no known correlation between color and exposure effects)

Potential exposure effects are listed such as allergic reactions, asthma, and fungal infections (occurring when immune system is weakened).

Myth 2 is described as:

My employees are complaining, but it is not an issue because its allergy season (complaints often correspond with a combination of indoor air quality factors [noting common mold exposure systems or allergic reactions])

The Presentation states that complaints (allergies, etc.) often warrant some form of investigation to identify factors present such as:

- Inadequate ventilation, HVAC problems, thermal comfort, air fresheners, potted plants, other chemicals
- Employee interviews, review medical records, job histories, and injuries and illnesses
- 3rd party investigation with no negative findings can provide positive impact

A case study of an academic office building is included addressing a 15-story office building with concerns in the basement offices. Issues noted included:

- Generator exhaust located 30' from basement OA intake
- CO2, formaldehyde, VOC results acceptable
- Black dust/debris falls from the supply louver in office
- Poor maintenance of AHUs

Myth 3 is described as:

No odors, no mold

Myth 4 is described as:

I must test to identify any visible mold

Issues associated with mold testing and abatement are described, such as:

Remove the mold growth and moisture source (including necessary measures). Also noted are the reasons for "testing":

- Sampling may be necessary to diagnose full extent of impact and to design thorough abatement plan
- Document conditions prior to abatement
- Verify abatement effectiveness

The importance of addressing water-damage building materials is identified along with mold remediation.

Recommendations for what needs to be done before measuring or sampling is undertaken include:

- Know what question(s) you want answered
- Know how to interpret the results
- Develop a sampling plan agreed by all involved

Air sampling to confirm successful remediation is discussed, including counting of fungal spore concentrations.

Recommendations listed include:

1. Take complaints seriously.
2. Don't hide information from building occupants.
3. Don't hide information from building occupants.
4. Before you collect samples, know what questions you want answered first.

A copy of the Presentation can be downloaded [here](#).