



## **TIPS TO HELP KEEP YOUR HOME FREE OF MOLD** **by Craig Whittaker, CIEC, HHS, Ph.D.**

If you have an unfinished basement, be sure to check it every week or so for moisture. A leak behind an upstairs wall or in a floor will often be noticed first by water leaking into the basement. Slow leaks are considered the homeowner's responsibility and most insurers will not assist with repair costs.

If you ever have a sudden & massive plumbing leak such as a hot water heater or water line burst, immediately call your homeowner's insurance provider and arrange for water clean-up. Material such as carpet, wood or sheetrock that remains damp for as little as 24 hours will grow mold.

If your house has a crawl space, be sure a plastic vapor barrier covers all of the soil. This will help prevent water from soaking the soil if a pipe bursts and will also prevent moisture from the dirt evaporating and causing high humidity in the crawl space.

Small amounts of mold in a home are normal, but when levels of mold spores in the inside air surpass outdoor levels, the EPA says that a home has a mold issue even if you don't see mold growing. Many molds grow undetected by the eye in wall cavities, closets, carpet and behind furniture. An air sample that is cultured in a lab for mold and compared to an outdoor reference sample is the best way to know if mold is actively growing in your home.

Humans can be affected by mold when they breathe mold spores or eat mold spores that have landed on food. In addition to acting like bacteria and causing infections, mold spores can release mycotoxins that may lead to a variety of serious health issues.

If you have your carpets steam-cleaned, do the job on a dry day and run fans and a dehumidifier to help get rid of moisture. Carpets allowed to stay damp for more than 24 hours can grow mold in the pad and sub-floor where it's hard to detect.

When going on vacation for even a few days, turn off water supplies to the toilets, icemaker and sinks. Ask a family member or neighbor to check your home at least once a week for signs of water. Keep the thermostat set at 76 degrees or lower in summer and 65 degrees or warmer in winter.

Many people do not realize that spring and fall, while wonderful times of year, present unique challenges to the homeowner. If you decide to turn off cooling/heating and open windows, be sure to keep track of humidity levels in the home; humidity should not exceed 50% indoors.

Mold on the exterior siding should be cleaned off using a mix of Borax soap and water. Mold on the outside of your home, while usually not pathogenic, can get indoors via spores that travel into your home through doors and windows and on clothing and shoes.

If your furnace is located in the attic, inspect the drip pan at least twice a year to be sure it is dry and can drain properly. Condensate line backups are a common cause of leaks and water damage in a home. These lines should also be insulated for 10 feet from the drain pan if located in an attic.

### **Environmental Solutions Group**

338 N. Elm St. Suite 109 PO Box 9341 Greensboro NC 27429-0341  
Office: 336.373.1538 Mobile: 336.456.3284