

Cal Poly

Safety Bulletin- Mold Awareness

The purpose of this document is to inform the campus community regarding the presence of mold on or within campus buildings. Mold awareness includes a description of mold, how it grows and spreads, how to recognize mold, routes of human exposure, associated health effects and methods of prevention and clean-up.



Molds or mildew are multicellular fungi that grow in moisture rich environments that contain organic material and a suitable temperature. They are found both inside and outdoors. Molds serve a number of useful purposes. They are commonly used in foods (cheese), flavoring of foods, production of medicine (penicillin) and as a fertilizer for soil by breaking down plant and animal material. In fact, if we didn't have mold to break down plant and animal matter we would be buried under all the debris.

Molds reproduce by creating millions of microscopic spores that become airborne until they find a suitable place to grow. When spores land on a suitable moist surface, they begin to grow and release chemicals that digest and can eventually destroy the surface and underlying materials. Mold spores can be inhaled or you can come in contact with spores. Some molds produce chemicals called mycotoxins, which can also be inhaled.

Most healthy workers will not be affected by the regular presence of molds unless the spore level and exposure is excessively high. However, some individuals may experience allergic reactions or, in rare cases, fungal infections or other health effects. People at high risk are elderly people, children, or people with weakened immune systems. Molds can cause nasal stuffiness, throat irritation, coughing or wheezing, eye irritation, or, in some cases, skin irritation or rashes.

You can see mold (fungal) colonies as fuzzy or wooly growths on surfaces like wood, paper or spoiled foods. Mildew is the term used to refer to fungal growth on fabric. Mold growth on surfaces can often be seen in the form of discoloration, frequently green, gray, brown or black but also white and other colors. You may notice a foul odor such as a musty or earthy smell. If you see or smell mold, or you or others in the building are having possible mold -related symptoms, report this to your supervisor or Environmental Health and Safety immediately.

It is impossible to eliminate all mold and mold spores indoors, so the most effective way to control indoor mold growth is to control moisture indoors. Some moisture problems in buildings have been linked to changes in building construction practices since the 1970s, which resulted in tightly sealed buildings with diminished ventilation, contributing to moisture vapor buildup. Other possible moisture problems: plumbing or roof leaks, landscaping or gutters that direct water into or under a building, or an unvented combustion appliance.

When water leaks or spills occur indoors - act promptly. A prompt response (within 24-48 hours) and thorough clean-up, drying, and/or removal of water-damaged materials will prevent or limit mold growth. If you have a significant leak or spill indoors, contact Environmental Health and Safety immediately for guidance on drying and elimination of the moisture.

In buildings where mold is a problem, the mold must be remediated and the sources of moisture eliminated right away. Avoid exposure while doing clean-up of mold. Refer to the Code of Safe Practices- Mold Remediation on the EH&S website.