

ENVIRONMENTAL HOME

Sad stories of mold in homes for sale

BY DAN HOWARD
FOR TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

The first time it happened was almost 30 years ago, and it still gives me the shivers. It was like watching a real estate train wreck.

The sales commission whistle was blowing, and the buyer was on that train to owning a moldy home.

Let's be clear. Some people don't react to or get sick from mold. Mold exposure is a little like Russian Roulette. If it is you or your family that gets sick, mold is a big deal.

Back to that first-time mold nightmare. I was inspecting a finished basement with nasty black mold in a closet and behind the basement walls which were open in that closet. This was in the room that the home buyers were going to use as a bedroom for one of their children.

Mold testing proved that the visible mold was *Stachybotrys*. That's the mold you would know as "toxic black mold." There was enough mold in the home that you could smell it from the top of the basement steps, so finding the mold was not difficult or a

Causes of mold

The most common conditions that cause mold in buildings:

- Finished basements
- Interior French drains
- Crawl spaces
- Homes that were unheated over a winter
- Flipped or foreclosed homes
- Homes that have had leaking basements, roofs, or windows
- Homes that have flooded
- Homes that had sewage backups or plumbing leaks

surprise.

Instead of suggesting that the mold be remediated, the realtor hired another inspector who declared that "testing isn't necessary because mold is present in all buildings."

He did a visual inspection and wrote a letter saying that mold is common and not a concern. I'm not suggesting that every realtor or seller ignores environmental hazards to sell a property. Most real estate professionals understand environmental hazards and do everything possible to protect their buyers' health.

The scenario of a buyer



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Mold is still present in this home, even after remediation was supposedly performed.

being convinced to buy a home with mold issues has played out in front of me many times over the past decades.

About four weeks ago, one of those times was a dad and a daughter who were sick in their home. Their family had moved into that home two years before our meeting. They showed me an almost identical letter declaring "no

problem" from that same inspector as the one from 30 years ago. Despite that letter, they had mold, and it was a problem.

The other scenario to fear is remediators treating the home without correcting the cause of the mold.

If mold grows on a piece of bread and you scrape the mold off, the mold will grow again.

Knowing that principal,

another inspector I know forwarded me a letter from another real estate deal.

The letter stated that treatment was performed. The remediator wrote a letter declaring his own "visual inspection showed no need for further testing."

Testing after treatment is usually done to show that treatment was successful. It's important for everyone to understand and recognize when environmental issues are not being properly handled. Despite the remediator's letter, there was visible mold in that home after remediation.

I suggested that my colleague test the home for his clients. My advice included checking the home the night before the scheduled testing to make sure that the home was not being "aired out" ahead of the test so that it would pass. It turns out that the seller had all the windows open when the house was checked the night before the scheduled testing.

The foundation leaks that caused the mold were not corrected, and the mold was still visible. The seller tried to cheat on the test.

Even if the mold level

was temporarily reduced, it will be back because the leaks weren't addressed.

Many people believe that all home inspectors will look for and recognize mold or other environmental hazards. The sad truth is mold and other environmental hazards are not considered part of the standards of practice for home inspectors.

It is tough to know what you don't know, and inspectors are not an exception to that rule.

The bottom line is that if there is an odor, staining, history of prior problems or everything is covered up with fresh paint, the best policies are to either not consider a property, or to hire an independent environmental expert you can trust.

For links and additional information about mold when buying a home, go to: www.EnviroSpect.com/RealEstate.

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GARDENING

'Curtain Call Deep Rose' worth a try late in season

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the spring. Make sure to provide a heavy mulch in the fall the first two seasons to prevent frost heaving.

'Curtain Call Deep Rose' Japanese Anemone typically grows 14-18 inches tall and 16-18 inches wide.

For best plant health and

results, space these plants 16-18 inches apart, center on center. It is great as a border plant or mass planted and is a wonderful cut flower.

Other wonderful features of 'Curtain Call Deep Rose' are deer and rabbits don't bother them, butterflies and other pollinators love them and they have no serious pest or disease issues.

Good companion plants are cone flowers, ornamental grasses, sedums and stonecrops.

Continue cutting back and dead heading perennials that are near the end of their growing cycle.

Now would be a good time to weed around them, apply a weed preventer for fall and add some extra mulch for winter protec-

tion. Doing so now will make less work come fall.

Perennials that are still going strong can be given some fertilizer, either liquid or granular.

If applying a liquid, use Ferti-lome's Rooting and Blooming water soluble fertilizer. Sustane Organic Compost Fertilizer is a good granular to use.

It can easily be tossed at the

base of the plant without fear of burning or causing any harm.

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