

THE ENVIRONMENTAL HOME

Pitfalls of dealing with mold issues

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FOR TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

The world of mold testing and remediation is the "Wild, Wild West."

We will "sort of" put this in the context of the real estate transaction, but if you are dealing with any mold issue, it would be better if there was "a sheriff in town" to put a little order into the mold world. Consumer education is a good step toward taming the Wild West.

The big list of landmines, lies and deceptions in mold testing

- Fake testing
- Inaccurate, invalid, uninformed and just plain stupid testing
- Improper or missing explanation of testing results
- Remediators that are not good at their job
- Misleading seller or buyers
- Realtors, buyers, sellers, or consumers that do not understand the issues

Fake testing

Yep, you will be surprised that "fake testing" is done by firms whose names you may recognize. ATP or Luminometer testing is a favorite "sales technique" of some small and some very high profile remediation companies. There are also some home inspectors who utilize the same misleading practice. In some instances, this may stay on the side of legality because they accurately tell you what it does. The deception is that the consumer is permitted to infer that it is also a "mold screening." All mold will have a positive ATP reading. ALL POSITIVE ATP READINGS ARE NOT MOLD!

What ATP testing companies tell you

"The ATP Detection System is the latest technology to detect and monitor harmful, microscopic organisms. ATP detection technology is used throughout the food and beverage industries, health care and pharmaceutical industries, hospitals, restaurants, supermarkets and other facilities where rapid detection of contamination is critical."

What ATP testing companies don't tell you

ATP testing does not distinguish between pollen, skin cells, bacteria, mucus from a



The ATP Luminometer

sneeze or any other organic material and mold. If they get a positive reading, it could be a million things other than mold. One slick company that offers the "free mold screening" now also offers mold testing in the fine print and at an additional cost. They know that with the expectation of a "free" mold test, the client will not likely opt to spend more money after being told that they "need" mold remediation as a result of the ATP test.

I have found numerous times that mold remediators have suggested unnecessary mold remediation when actual mold testing showed perfectly acceptable levels. The home inspectors use the positive ATP test results to refer themselves or a partner mold remediation company for remediation. Protein stick tests fall into the same category, but are less common. The web link below will provide information on these tests.

Inaccurate, invalid, uninformed and just plain stupid testing

Free enterprise is a wonderful thing ... usually. There are mold labs that market their testing services to anybody who can breathe. They sell the home inspector on the premise that they can make an additional \$300 to \$400 while performing home inspections, no education or training required.

Just as you see fake medical doctors, there are numerous testing companies where the person performing the testing is absolutely clueless.

Demand an explanation of test results

After testing is complete, the next important step is being able to understand, interpret and explain the results. You would not accept a medical lab report without explanation. Do not hire a testing company that only passes through the results without telling you what they mean.

Testing procedures and report writing in easy-to-understand language has been standardized by www.Testall.com. They are a resource to search for trained testing professionals that use the reporting service that is intended to be in plain language and consumer-oriented. You may remember the ad claiming "No banker babble." Testall is "no mold babble."

Remediators who are not good at their job

All of us would like to believe that everyone does their job competently. On the other side, an old expression is: "If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride." Experience has proven that there are many remediators that not only fail to correct mold issues, but make them worse by spreading the mold.

In real estate transactions, the incentive to use low-price professionals without regard to qualifications is very strong. There are lower-cost remediation options, but the trick is understanding the ones that work. The day a house transfers between buyer and seller, ownership of the mold also transfers. In every instance, every remediation, your only defense against a continued mold problem is a post-remediation test. Get one from a qualified independent testing company

Buyers who exaggerate mold conditions for a price reduction

This can be infuriating. Mold is the hot issue in real estate. I recently reviewed a home buyer's demand for a house price reduction of \$20,000 because mold was "found" in the home inspection. Review of the lab test results by a mold expert revealed that the results were well within

normal and very passing levels. The report from the inspector also indicated that fact. The seller's nicely-worded demand for the reduction indicated that the reason was that "in conversation," the inspector said that the mold is a problem.

Sellers who do not properly correct real mold issues

Remember, the day of closing, ownership of mold is transferred. A seller may falsely claim that the mold issue is resolved. Make sure as a buyer, you control the post-remediation test. Verify that the conditions for the test were proper. Opening windows to air out the home right before a mold test is one of many ways for a seller to obtain a passing clearance test in a home that should fail.

Realtors, buyers, sellers who do not understand the issues

There is a lot of room for things to go wrong when the people involved do not have a background in any technical or complicated situation including mold.

It can be made worse when the financial incentive for all of the parties is that a potential mold or other health risk be minimized and the deal is easy to close. There are many, many ethical professionals in every field, but you need to make sure that the people you are working with have your best interest at heart and that they understand the issues.

The best way to verify a mold professional is qualified is to obtain recommendations from trusted sources. The educational organizations such as ECCAN, ACAC, IAQA are resources to verify professional credentials and will list them on their websites.

The bottom line is that an educated consumer is empowered to make good decisions.

For additional links, resources and information about mold testing, landmines and reliable sources, go to www.EnviroSpect.info/RealEstateMold

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