

ENVIRONMENTAL HOME

Extreme cold contributing to spread of mold

By Dan Howard

For TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

The crazy cold weather sweeping the nation is making mold a problem from top to bottom in many homes that have never had a mold problem before.

Your home could be one of those homes, and you might not know it ... yet. This is especially true in homes with high-efficiency construction and improvements.

The mold in attics and crawlspaces is the sneaky mold that comes from cold weather. Warm air in the living areas of the home holds a lot of moisture. When that warm, moist air hits the attic or crawlspace, it condenses on the surfaces. That moisture freezes into layers of ice. The colder the weather and the longer the time of cold weather, the more ice builds up.

You would be amazed to look in a cold attic or crawlspace and see layers of ice on the nails and wood surfaces. When that ice melts, it can soak the wood, creating the ideal conditions for the growth of mold that could go unnoticed for months. Black, fuzzy mold could meet you when you finally poke your head into those areas.

You could save much heartache and expense by taking the time to check on those areas sooner than later.

Attack the winter ice

Rapid thawing of built-up ice can result in severe damage to a home. Use of evaporation techniques and equipment by a professional is the best way to minimize damage to a property from ice buildup.

In cold areas, commercial dehumidification equipment will not be effective. Adding heat too quickly can result in materials getting damaged from the ice becoming water.

The secret trick of the professionals is air movement causing evaporation from the iced area to the exterior, which is the best solution to minimize damage to the home.



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Cold, wintry weather can lead to a number of things that contribute to the growth of mold in the home.

Freezing can lead to flooding

A quick response and effective drying techniques of water-damaged materials are critical to minimizing the damage to a building and its contents and the potential health effects on occupants.

Professional equipment and services usually saves money in losses. It is worth considering hiring professionals, even when a homeowner does not have insurance coverage.

Do I have insurance coverage?

The answer to that question is "that depends."

The first thing you should do is read your individual policy. Some insurance companies offer good coverage for mold. Many other insurance companies have limits or exclusions for mold.

The key to obtaining mold and water damage coverage is understanding that there are policies that cover "mold consequential to a covered loss." In plain English, that means if something like a pipe

breaks and you get mold, it could be covered. If the mold is because your basement walls leak when it rains, it's probably not covered.

Flood damage from sources outside of homes, such as rivers and streams, is generally not covered unless you have flood insurance. Flooding from internal sources, such as broken pipes, is generally covered.

Keep it or toss it?

Food items that have been in contact or stored in areas with mold or water damage should be thrown away.

Materials that have a solid surface, such as plastic, glass or metal, and that have no electronics or foam padding, are easily cleaned and preserved.

Soap and water or a commercial disinfectant are the simplest cleaning methods. A mixture of ¼ cup of Clorox to a gallon of water is another way to disinfect hard-surfaced materials. Do not use a higher concentration of Clorox, as it can result in harm to people, pets and

the items the mixture contacts.

The short story is if contents are porous and flood-contaminated or moldy, they will probably need to be thrown away. This includes cardboard, carpet, padding, stuffed animals and upholstery. Mattresses and box springs are also on that list.

Paper materials that did not get wet or damp and do not have visible mold or damage can be preserved with simple HEPA vacuuming. Most paper products, including books, will need to be thrown out once moldy or wet from flooding. For very valuable items, such as a family Bible, there is an expensive but effective freeze-drying process that can preserve those items.

Clothing is readily saved by washing in regular laundry detergent unless the fabric has been damaged. Mold will clean out of machine-washable material, but damaged clothing is not restored to its original condition by washing.

Major and small appliances that have mold exposure but have not been under water can be saved with

a professional cleaning. Consult a professional about these items.

As an example, a hard drive can be removed from a computer and salvaged but could be damaged if powered on with moldy electronics.

All appliances, big and small, that have been underwater will need to be replaced. The cost of cleaning some of these items often exceeds the cost of replacement.

Failure to clean these can result in fires, health hazards or recontamination of the home. Furnaces, hot water tanks and washing machines are total losses if any part of the components have been under water.

Mold can hide, spread easily

Forced-air furnaces can redistribute mold through an entire home after the property is cleaned. Furnace ductwork, blowers and cabinets need to be cleaned as a part of any mold remediation.

Mold can and will live behind walls. The removal of house wall finishes might be required to get rid of the mold. If you do this work yourself, learn and follow the principals of containment, negative air and air scrubbing. Handling of mold-contaminated materials should be done with personal protective equipment, such as gloves, eye protection and masks.

There are materials used in the construction of homes that will require replacement as opposed to cleaning. Fiberboard, carpet and padding are examples.

Water events and ice buildups can result in damage to property, contents and the occupants' health. Go to envirospect.info/WinterMold for links and sources of additional information about contaminated materials or how to locate a professional service.

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