



NYCOSH
New York Committee for
Occupational Safety & Health

HURRICANE CLEANUP WORKERS **MOLD FACTSHEET**

Hurricanes damage many homes, schools, and businesses. Sheetrock, carpets, and other building materials and furnishings become damaged by water. These are likely to be contaminated with mold.

Workers doing cleanups or ripouts may be exposed to mold on the job.

These workers may become temporarily or permanently ill

unless they use the right personal protective equipment, including the proper respirator.

WHAT IS MOLD?

Molds are tiny organisms. They are a natural part of the environment. Molds are usually present both outdoors and indoors. They are usually not harmful. However, some people get sick when they are exposed to high amounts or certain types of mold. Mold grows indoors when there is moisture (leaks, floods, high humidity) and food (anything organic, including wood, dirt, carpeting, or sheetrock).

HOW DOES MOLD AFFECT HEALTH?

Breathing in or touching mold can cause health problems. Both live mold and dead mold can cause health problems. Killing mold (for example, with bleach) does not get rid of all the health hazards.

Exposure to mold can cause several types of health problems:

- **Irritation** - burning eyes, congestion, cough, post-nasal drip.
- **Allergy** - asthma, itchy watery eyes, congestion, cough, wheezing, tightness in the chest, trouble breathing.
- **Poisoning and Infectious Disease** - Some molds may cause serious illness or infection. (However, this does not happen often. People with compromised immune systems are most at risk.)



HOW CAN WORKERS TELL IF HARMFUL MOLD IS PRESENT?

Even though molds can sometimes be seen or smelled, workers cannot always tell for sure whether harmful mold is present or not.

**ALWAYS ASSUME THAT WATER-DAMAGED BUILDINGS, MATERIALS,
AND FURNISHINGS ARE CONTAMINATED WITH MOLD.
USE PROPER PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT
AND SAFE WORK PRACTICES!**

WORKER PROTECTION AND SAFE WORK PRACTICES

The main way that mold gets into people's bodies and affects their health is by breathing it in. *Hurricane cleanup workers should always wear a respirator when working around mold. Dust masks and surgical masks are not respirators. They do not protect against mold.* Use the right respirator and filters (see below). Make sure the respirator or filter says "NIOSH approved." Learn now how to do a *seal check* each time you use the respirator. Change filters or use a new disposable N95 respirator at the beginning of each work day (or more often if necessary).



**N95 Disposable
Air Purifying
Respirator**



**Half Face
Air Purifying
Respirator**



**Full Face
Air Purifying
Respirator**

For small cleanup/rip-out jobs (example: up to 3 sheets of sheetrock):

- Use an N95 disposable respirator (a reusable half face respirator with N95 filters is better).
- Wear protective gloves (non-latex, vinyl, nitrile, or rubber).
- Wear tight-fitting goggles designed to keep out dust (no holes or vents).

For large cleanup/rip-out jobs (example: more than 3 sheets of sheetrock):

- Use a full-face respirator with N, R, or P100 filters (or powered air purifying respirator [PAPR] with HEPA filter).
- If a full face-respirator is not available, use an N95 disposable respirator or a reusable half face respirator with N95 filters. Also use tight-fitting goggles designed to keep out dust.
- Wear disposable protective clothing that covers the entire body, including head and shoes.
- Wear protective gloves (non-latex, vinyl, nitrile, or rubber).

For any area with known or suspected mold contamination:

- Wet down mold-contaminated surfaces to prevent mold from getting into the air.
- Use HEPA vacuum cleaners only - no dry sweeping or non-HEPA vacuums.
- Place used disposable personal protective equipment in a secured bag and discard.
- Clean reusable personal protective equipment before reusing.
- Wash hands and face with soap and clean water before eating or smoking.
- Shower with soap and clean water before driving or returning home.
- Wash personal clothing that may contain mold or other contaminants separately.
- Be aware that you may also be exposed to harmful chemicals like asbestos and lead. These may require additional protection.