

Mold Factsheet for Hurricane & Flood Cleanup Workers

Rain, leaks and floods from hurricanes and other major events can damage homes, schools, and businesses. In many buildings that have water damage, sheetrock, carpets, and other building materials and furnishings become contaminated with mold.

Many damaged buildings that contain mold must be cleaned up. Some workers are hired specifically to remove mold. Other workers remove damaged building materials and furnishings or do cleaning and renovation.

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 almost always present both outdoors and indoors. They are usually not harmful. However, some people get sick when indoor amounts of molds become much higher than outdoor amounts, or when certain types of mold that are not usually present indoors start to grow indoors.

Molds multiply 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 living 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.* Molds can cause burning eyes, congestion, cough, and postnasal drip.
- *Allergy.* People who have become allergic to molds may develop asthma, causing itchy watery eyes, congestion, cough, wheezing, tightness in the chest, and difficulty breathing.
- *Poisoning and Infectious Disease.* Some molds create chemicals that may cause serious illness. A small number of certain types of molds can cause serious infections. (However, poisoning or infectious disease caused by mold is rare. People with compromised immune systems are most at risk.)

HOW CAN WORKERS TELL IF HARMFUL MOLD IS PRESENT?

Molds can't be seen without a microscope. Even though mold growth can sometimes be seen or smelled, workers cannot always tell for sure whether harmful mold is present or not.

HURRICANE AND FLOOD CLEANUP WORKERS SHOULD ASSUME THAT WATER-DAMAGED BUILDINGS, MATERIALS OR FURNISHINGS ARE CONTAMINATED WITH MOLD.

USE PROPER PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) 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 (inhalation).

Hurricane and flood cleanup workers should always wear a respirator when working around mold.

Workers should:

- use the right respirator and filters and make sure the respirator is "NIOSH approved"
- be ***fit-tested*** for the right model and size by a professional
- know how to put the respirator on and perform ***seal checks*** each time it is worn
- change filters or use a new disposable N95 respirator at the beginning of each work day (or more often if necessary).



**Disposable
Air Purifying
Respirator**



**Half Face
Air Purifying
Respirator**



**Full Face
Air Purifying
Respirator**

- ***Dust masks and surgical masks are not respirators. They do not protect against mold.***
- All employers, including contractors, must comply with the OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard (29 CFR 1910.134).
- OSHA law protects all workers, including undocumented workers.

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), and
- non-latex, vinyl, nitrile, or rubber gloves, and
- tight-fitting goggles designed to keep out dust (no holes or vents).

A small mold cleanup job is:

- 10 square feet or less of heating, ventilation, or air conditioning equipment, ducts, or insulation,
- or 100 square feet or less of building materials such as ceiling tiles or sheetrock.

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

- full-face respirator with N, R, or P100 filters (or powered air purifying respirator [PAPR] with HEPA filter), and
- disposable protective clothing that covers the entire body, including head and shoes, and
- non-latex, vinyl, nitrile, or rubber gloves.

A large mold cleanup job is:

- more than 10 square feet of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning equipment, ducts, pipes, and insulation, or
- more than 100 square feet of building materials such as ceiling tiles or sheetrock, or
- any size area, indoors or outdoors, where a lot of dust is generated during work operations, or
- any place where there is a lot of visible mold.

For any area with known or suspected mold contamination:

- Wet down mold-contaminated surfaces to prevent mold dust from getting into the air.
- Use HEPA vacuum cleaners only - no dry sweeping or non-HEPA vacuums.
- Bag, secure, and discard disposable personal protective equipment after it is used.
- 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.
- Be aware that you may also be exposed to harmful chemicals like asbestos and lead that may require additional protection.