

WARM EDGE

DIGEST

Mold begins to matter — first architects, then doctors, now lawyers

The message on mold certainly got through in Polk County, Florida, when the failure of a thousand windows on a new \$36 million courthouse, along with a



Polk County Courthouse, Florida

leaking roof, poor envelope design and a number of HVAC system inadequacies, racked up \$45 million in moisture damage, and millions more in confidentially resolved health care claims.

The message got through even more strongly in the Cleveland area, where over 30 babies were hospitalized and a number of infant deaths were associated with the mold, *Stachybotrys Chartarum*, and the bleeding lungs it can cause.

In fact, the mold message has been so well transmitted of late, that an entire, three-hour, litigation symposium on the subject was held at this year's American Bar Association (ABA) summer meeting in Toronto.

With mold-related court-dockets over the last five years totalling near \$1 billion in the U.S. and Canada, those lawyers paying the most attention at the symposium were doing so for clients who may have a lot to lose someday.

Just what are molds is a logical

question — a partial answer being that unlike the allergenic and toxic health problems they cause and the ensuing huge financial implications, molds themselves are very simple biological lifeforms that are loners, so to speak, needing very little to survive, save a small but continuous source of moisture.

Very abundant in nature, some molds are friendly, some are not. They do occur indoors, though, and are most likely to be found wherever there is dampness. Molds congregate in three main areas: basements, moistened from



Typical wet wood mold



Fungal mycelia inside wood cells causing soft rot

soil-drainage or soil-gas leakage; poorly maintained ventilation systems; and windows that either leak or show marked, condensation.

Specifically with windows, both condensation and leakage result in water droplets that if left unattended saturate the window, plus adjacent walls, floors and carpet areas.

All are ideal for mold-growth, reports Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. (CMHC) senior research officer, Jim White, in Ottawa.

For a number of years, CMHC, Health Canada and Natural Resources Canada have been involved in world-leading epidemiological studies of mold on health.

Nationwide surveys and more intense community-based work in Southwestern Ontario showed that children living in damp, moldy houses suffer from 50% more asthma and 60% more respiratory disease than people in dry houses.

In its first year now, a five-year, \$2-\$3 million pioneering study has been underway in Canada's smallest province, Prince Edward Island — one that will examine mold's health impact on new-born infants and small children, plus take a look at preventative actions that might curb the problem.

"There's no question, windows are coming in for special attention in all of this," says Dr. David Miller, a chemist and mold-toxin expert at Carleton University in Ottawa. "It is very common for the window manufacturer to be named in litigations," notes Dr. Miller, who addressed ABA's summer meeting.

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BETWEEN YOU AND THE ELEMENTS.

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