

Sniffing Out Mold

Mold Detection Has Gone To The Dogs

BY LAURI CROCE STREETER, ESQ.



Toxic and other strains of molds are making headlines and are responsible for millions of dollars in litigation. Expensive remediation costs face schools, businesses and homeowners – including homeowners associations. Mold-detection firms are proliferating (pun intended). And firms nationwide are beginning to go to the dogs – literally – using mold-sniffing dogs to detect potentially toxic mold spores hidden from the naked-eye of humans, mold concealed behind drywall or under floorboards. The consensus is that dogs can detect up to eighteen strains of mold – from the common indoor mold known as *Aspergillus* to the toxic so-called “black” mold known as *Stachybotrys*.



According to a November 2002 article posted on moldnews.net:

A Roseville [California] company has recruited a four-legged helper as a cheaper and more accurate way to pinpoint toxic mold problems.

Sydney is no ordinary Labrador mix. She can use her nose for detective work that's well

beyond human senses.

Sydney is billed as the only dog in California that is certified to hunt down mold troubles.

“The master-trainer for Sydney is an FBI trainer that trains drug dogs, bomb dogs and arson-accel-erant dogs. So (it's) almost the exact same training process,” said mold detec-tive Russ Collaiu.

“She does a pretty good job at pointing where it is, narrowing it down, pinpointing it,” said dog handler Pamela Demarest.

“Time and time again, over the last 60 days, since we've had Sydney, she's proven me wrong, where I think, ‘no, there can't be a mold situation going on there.’ But we test to verify her find-ings, and every time, she's been right,”

Collaiu said.

Sydney's employer, Mold Detectives of Roseville, says this is a more accurate and cost-effective way to track down mold troubles. Toxic mold is an issue that has sparked numerous health complaints in recent years.

“Constant respiratory infections, constant fever, constant headaches. I have a splitting headache right now,” said house renter Lori

Scarborough.

In one notable case, a family was forced to burn its home, instead of paying to remove mold.

The problem has sparked inquiries and efforts to develop new stand-ards for dealing with mold.

“With the insurance com-panies, the lawyers, all the growth on the mold issue, this is a cost effective way to get solutions to people,” Collaiu said.

Mold Detectives officials say that dogs have been used in Europe for years to detect these problems, but that only recently did they make their appearance in the United States.

As the moldnews.net article sug-gests, mold detection dog must be pro-fessionally trained. The professional handler gives special orders to instruct the dog where to go during an investi-gation of a building suspected of har-boring mold. Once the dog has familiarized itself with the rooms, it will alert the handler to the presence of mold by a series of marks and behaviors that the dog handler is spe-cially trained to recognize. At the places where the dog marks a mold odor, samples are gathered and must be taken to a laboratory for confirm-ing analysis. By this well-directed pro-cedure, needless destruction of material is eliminated and expensive additional costs can be avoided.

The Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) does not endorse the use of mold-sniffing dogs, but as the incidence of toxic mold in residential structures rises and the costs of detecting, identifying and remediating the mold increases, more and more two-legged experts are using their four-legged friends to assist in the effort. ■

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