



# QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN HIRING A REMEDIATION COMPANY

By Kendra Seymour, NCMP, NCRSI

## WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Remediation is like the wild west. It is not regulated at the federal level, nor is it regulated in many states. In fact, the person who is remediating your home may not be bound by any professional licenses, certifications, or legal requirements. As a result, ineffective, insufficient, and unsafe practices are commonplace.

Companies that rely on painting, fogging, or covering up mold in place of proper removal, or who remove mold and water damage without proper precautions, are putting the health, home, and finances of their client at risk.

While the ANSI/IICRC S520 offers the only accredited mold remediation standards, these standards are currently optional for remediation companies to follow, and company certification doesn't necessarily mean compliance or implementation of these standards. Certifications should be considered minimal requirements. Be sure to thoroughly vet anyone you hire. The questions below are designed to help you find a knowledgeable professional.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Before you begin, be sure to work with a knowledgeable **Indoor Environmental Professional (IEP)** and download your free copy of **"Mold Remediation at a Glance,"** which provides a detailed, consumer-friendly overview of the remediation process at [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org/free-downloads](http://ChangeTheAirFoundation.org/free-downloads).

## QUESTIONS TO ASK THE REMEDIATION COMPANY

### 1. What standards or protocols do you follow? What certifications and training do your workers have?

Mold remediation in the United States is not regulated at the federal level, nor is it regulated in most states. This means a wide range of practices can be considered “remediation.”

At a minimum, we recommend that remediation companies follow the standards laid out by the most current edition of the **ANSI/IICRC S520**. However, these standards are optional for remediation companies to follow, and certification doesn't necessarily mean compliance or implementation of these standards. For some individuals, such as hypersensitive or immunocompromised occupants, remediation practices may need to exceed what is recommended by the ANSI/IICRC S520 standards.

Additionally, ask about the qualifications and training of the people who will be responsible for physically removing mold and water damage from your home. Often, only a single individual, such as the owner or project manager, has official training and certifications. However, they rarely perform the work themselves. Be sure to ask about the specific training of the workers or technicians who will be responsible for removing any microbial growth and water damage, and how the company ensures compliance with what is outlined in the scope of the work.

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**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Certifications are minimum requirements. Always ask for details about their process. Use the questions in this document and resources at [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org](https://www.ChangeTheAirFoundation.org) to find a knowledgeable professional.

### 2. Will you follow the protocol and recommendations written by a third-party company such as an Indoor Environmental Professional (IEP)?

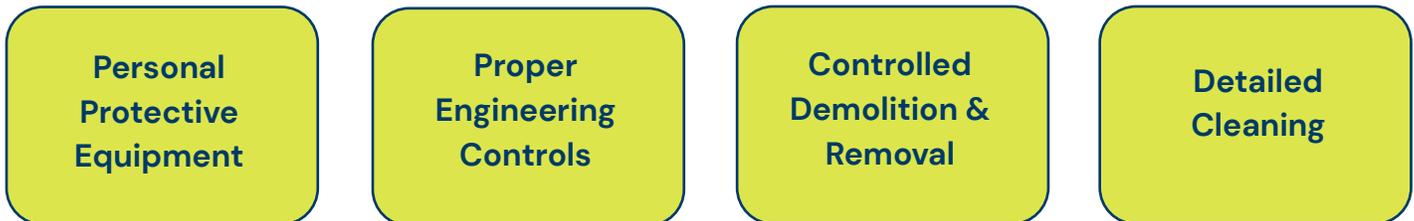
The answer should be “yes.” The IEP's report should clearly outline the scope of work for the remediation company. These recommendations should be based on what is best for you and your home, not what is fastest, cheapest, or easiest for the remediation company.

To learn more on how to find a knowledgeable IEP, download our free resource [“Questions to Ask When Hiring an IEP.”](#)

### 3. What are the general steps involved in a typical remediation project?

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** No two remediation projects are the same. The description below provides a very general overview of the remediation process. It is not a step-by-step description. For more information, download your free copy of "[Mold Remediation at a Glance](#)" at [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org/free-downloads](https://www.ChangeTheAirFoundation.org/free-downloads) and work with a knowledgeable IEP.

In general, remediating areas of microbial growth and water damage involves four elements:



Remediation involves managing millions of microscopic particles. While anyone can attempt to remediate an area, not everyone can remediate safely and correctly. The devil lies in the details of how each part of the process is executed. For example, if containment is poorly constructed, if proper pressure isn't established, if mold isn't sufficiently removed from building materials, or if workers cross-contaminate the home as they enter or exit containment, then it can make the overall situation in the home worse. **Bottom line: Details matter!**

All workers should wear **personal protective equipment (PPE)**. This means protection from head to toe (for more details, see explanation in **Question #5**). If a company won't invest in keeping their workers safe, chances are they won't keep you or your home safe. After taking steps to protect the other areas of the home (removing furniture or certain belongings from the home, shutting off the HVAC or other heating and cooling systems to prevent cross-contamination, etc.), the next step typically involves setting up **proper engineering controls** which include building containments and establishing proper pressure (for more details, see the explanation in **Question #4**). The purpose of these engineering controls is to minimize the further spread of mold spores or contaminants into other areas of the home while remediation is being performed. Containment should be as small as possible but as large as needed. This should include covering all supply and return vents to prevent **cross-contamination**.

Once the environment and workers are protected, **controlled demolition and removal** begins. Materials should be removed a minimum of 18–24 inches beyond any visible or known water damage or microbial growth. Impacted materials are removed safely (see **Question #7** for more details). Any materials that remain (i.e. support beams, wood framing, etc.) are HEPA vacuumed, damp wiped, and an appropriate abrasive measure is used to remove mold "roots" that may have grown into the building materials. Examples of abrasive measures include wire brushing, HEPA sanding, and soda blasting. The area is then HEPA vacuumed or wiped again. Avoid companies that don't properly remove mold from structural components and simply spray them with harsh chemicals or cover them with encapsulants.

Finally, the entire area inside containment, including ceilings, walls, and floors, undergoes **detailed cleaning**. This involves HEPA vacuuming, damp wiping, and HEPA vacuuming/wiping again. This is referred to as a "HEPA Sandwich" or "HEPA Pizza". This is a meticulous and time-

consuming part of the process as the goal is to remove any contamination that may have settled on surfaces. Every surface inside the containment should be cleaned following this procedure. Do **not** hire a company who skips this step.

Per the ANSI/IICRC S520, you do **not** need to rely on harsh chemicals or encapsulants. The solution for damp wiping should contain a surfactant or detergent. Any cleaning agents, antimicrobials, etc., should be approved by the client ahead of time (see **Question #6**).

Once the steps above are completed, containment remains up and air scrubbers run for a predetermined amount of time prior to **post-remediation verification** (clearance testing) being performed. As a reminder, post-remediation verification should be completed by a third party (such as an IEP), not your remediation company. (See **Question #9**).

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** You must correct the moisture source that allowed for the mold growth to begin in the first place. If you don't, your problem is likely to return.

To learn more about the remediation process, watch our free **Mold Remediation Mini Class Series (Coming Fall 2024)** or download your free copy of "[Mold Remediation at a Glance](#)."

"Physically removing mold contamination is the primary means of remediation. Mold contamination should be physically removed from the structure, systems and contents... Attempts to kill, encapsulate or inhibit mold instead of proper source removal generally are not adequate."

[Section 4.4 – Principles Of Mold Remediation; page 18]

"Source removal of mold contamination should always be the primary means of remediation. Indiscriminate use of antimicrobials, coatings, sealants, and cleaning chemicals is not recommended."

[Section 5.8.1 – Chemicals (Antimicrobials & Biocides); page 20]

## A FEW HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ANSI/IICRC S520 (2015)

Porous building materials (e.g., drywall, insulation and ceiling tiles)... should be removed and discarded. Remediators should remove mold growth on wood framing members by HEPA-vacuuming followed by damp wiping, wire brushing, sanding, or other appropriate method."

[Section 12.2.6 – Demolition & Surface Cleaning; pages 47-48]

"Using antimicrobials, fungicidal coatings, mold-resistant coatings, or sealants... during mold remediation as a substitute for proper source removal is discouraged. If [they are used], remediators should apply them after completion of remediation, and after completion of post-remediation verification, when necessary."

[Section 12.2.9 – Clean-Up; page 50]

#### 4. How do you protect the home and occupants from cross-contamination?

*Proper engineering controls are an important part of the remediation process because they minimize the spread of spores and contamination into other parts of the home. Setting up proper containments around the area to be remediated provides a critical barrier between the area to be remediated and the rest of the home.*

*Typically, containment is built with **6 mil plastic** and will run floor to ceiling. There should be no gaps or tears in containment and seams should be sealed. A second **decontamination chamber** is typically built off the main containment in order to serve as an intermediary space to put on and take off PPE, lessening the risk of cross-contamination into the rest of the home.*

*Proper containment alone won't stop 100% of spores from entering the home, so it must be combined with proper pressure. A **HEPA-filtered Air Filtration Device (AFD)**, also known as an air scrubber, is converted into a **negative air machine (NAM)**. Typically, but not always, containment is negatively pressurized (around -5 pascals). The pressure should be monitored continually throughout the remediation project using a tool such as a manometer. In some cases, establishing negative pressure inside the containment may not be possible and instead the home may be put under positive pressure.*

*Additional measures include setting up procedures to enter and exit the containment in a way that minimizes the spread of contamination from people, equipment, and bagged materials. If the home has an HVAC system and ductwork, measures should be taken to clean and protect the unit and ductwork.*

*Finally, your remediation company should clean any equipment such as AFDs between each job to limit cross-contamination from one project to another.*

*To learn more about engineering controls including containment and proper pressure, download your free copy of "[Mold Remediation at a Glance](#)" or watch Part 5 of our free **Mold Remediation Mini Class Series (Coming Fall 2024)**.*

#### 5. How do you protect your workers?

*Protecting workers is a critical part of the process. If a company doesn't invest in keeping its workers safe, chances are they won't keep you and your home safe. Workers should be in full personal protective equipment (PPE) which includes full body protective suits (with a hood and booties), eye protection, gloves, and respiratory protection (i.e. full face P100 respirator, properly fitted, and in good working order).*

*To learn more about PPE, download your free copy of "[Mold Remediation at a Glance](#)" or watch our free **Mold Remediation Mini Class Series (Coming Fall 2024)**.*

## 6. What chemicals and solutions do you use in the process?

Per the ANSI/IICRC S520 and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), harsh chemicals are rarely needed. Your remediation company can use an antimicrobial (i.e. isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or vinegar), a surfactant (like dish soap), and water. This can be very effective when combined with abrasive measures and proper engineering controls and procedures.



Any chemicals, cleaning agents, or solutions should be approved ahead of time by the client. Always ask to see the product label of any product. Any antimicrobials should be nontoxic, low odor, and environmentally friendly.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Do **not** hire companies who rely on chemical shortcuts alone as research has shown this is unlikely to be sufficient.

Before approving any chemicals, we strongly recommend you download your free copy of "[Mold Remediation at a Glance](#)" and review pages 14–16 which are dedicated to chemical usage during remediation or watch our free **Mold Remediation Mini Class Series (Coming Fall 2024)**.

## 7. How do you dispose of contaminated material?

Any debris should be double bagged and closed using the gooseneck technique. The exterior of any bags is wiped down prior to being taken out of the containment. This is done to help minimize cross-contamination.

Additionally, building a corridor to move people, materials, and equipment in and out of the containment safely may be needed. This will reduce cross-contamination of the rest of the home. Your remediation company should have a plan for how and when contaminated material is to be removed from your property (i.e. dumpsters, truck, etc.).

## 8. Do you document your work?

Since the homeowner or occupant should not be present during remediation, it's a good idea to have your remediation company document their work. This can be particularly important for legal and insurance cases. Many companies use software for photo documentation of their work projects. It is normal practice to provide the client with access to these photos so that you can track the progress of the project virtually.

## 9. Do you guarantee your work? What happens if my Indoor Environmental Professional does not “pass” the job?

The company should guarantee their work. You, your IEP, and the remediation company should agree ahead of time in writing what post-remediation verification (PRV) results will mean the remediation has “passed.” It should be written into the contract that if the IEP “fails” post-remediation verification, the remediation company will come to address the issues at no additional cost to the client (you).



To learn more about post-remediation verification including sample PRV criteria, download our free resources [“Mold Remediation Contracts”](#) and [“Mold Remediation at a Glance.”](#)



## 10. What type of insurance do you carry and do you have any references I can call?

Ask for proof they are properly insured. This means **Contractors Pollution Liability, General Liability, and Workers’ Compensation**. A company that uses cheaper office or janitorial Workers’ Compensation insurance policies isn’t providing proper protection. If they don’t have all three, they aren’t properly insured, which means you may be liable in the event of accident or injury! In addition to checking reviews online and with organizations like the Better Business Bureau, ask for references from previous clients that you can call.

### A few important reminders as you start the hiring process:

- ✓ Get quotes from at least **three** different companies. Quotes should include specific details about the **scope of work** and price.
- ✓ Ask for **certifications** and ask what training the technicians who will be performing the work have received.
- ✓ Read every part of the **contract** – especially the fine print! Do **not** rely on verbal, email, or text agreements. Everything should be in writing: this includes the exact procedures, materials, equipment, and scope of work to be performed.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Once areas of physical microbial growth and water damage are remediated, it may be necessary to address **cross-contamination** that may have occurred in the rest of the home. See **Steps 4 and Step 5** in the diagram below.

For step-by-step support navigating the inspection and remediation process, please visit our "Start Here" tab at [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org](https://www.ChangeTheAirFoundation.org)



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## STEPS TO INSPECTING & REMEDIATING YOUR HOME FOR MOLD & WATER DAMAGE

By Kendra Seymour, NCMP, NCRSI

1

Inspect your home or building for signs of mold and water damage. If mold and water damage is found or suspected, consider hiring a *knowledgeable* Indoor Environmental Professional (IEP) who can determine the extent of any problems and determine next steps.

2

If remediation is recommended, consider hiring a *knowledgeable* remediation company that follows, at a minimum, the practices outlined in "*Mold Remediation at a Glance*."

3

Perform post-remediation verification (clearance testing) of work areas. This is typically done by a third party such as an IEP.

4

Clean the rest of the home and belongings (sometimes known as small particle cleaning), and consider cleaning the HVAC and ductwork (if HVAC and ductwork were not addressed as part of Step 2) to remove cross-contamination. Additional testing may be considered at this point.

5

Reevaluate how you feel in the home and consider working with a knowledgeable healthcare practitioner if health symptoms and concerns persist. Implement preventive measures, regular maintenance, and a cleaning schedule.

