

Jessica McQuade

Thu, Feb 01, 2024 11:44AM 48:20

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

water, crawl space, mold, attic, home, basement, homeowner, talk, crawlspace, issues, house, caulk, moisture, line, number, leak, turn, dry, hypersensitive, bathroom

SPEAKERS

Kendra Seymour, Jessica McQuade

- K** Kendra Seymour 00:04
Hello everyone, my name is Kendra Seymour and welcome back to another Change the Air Foundation interview. I'm joined today by Jessica McQuade, also known as the Mold Mentor. And she's going to talk to us about 10 of the most common reasons for mold and water damage that she's seen day in and day out with her clients. So thank you, Jessica, so much for joining us.
- J** Jessica McQuade 00:22
My pleasure. Thanks for having me.
- K** Kendra Seymour 00:24
Now, for those who don't know Jessica yet, she is the owner and operator of Mold Mentor, LLC, providing mold consulting, coaching, and support to the hypersensitive community. As a toxic mold survivor herself, she's extremely passionate about helping others navigate the process of dealing with mold in their homes. She's trained as a certified mold inspector and mold remediator with multiple certifying bodies such as NORMI and the IICRC. She considers it her professional responsibility to never stop learning. Jessica I absolutely love that because I am a learner at heart myself. So again, I can't wait for us to jump into some of these things. Because I think the average person, you know, so often mold and water damage, it's out of sight out of mind that we're not thinking about it. And then by the time we do notice it, it's a huge problem. So I'm excited to get started with your top 10 list.
- J** Jessica McQuade 01:16
Yeah, let's do it.

K

Kendra Seymour 01:17

So number one, before we even jump in, tell us a little bit about how you got into this field.

J

Jessica McQuade 01:24

Oh, so I mean, everybody in this space has their story, right? So while they're all unique, there are a lot of similarities where, you know, basically, I got really sick, took me seven years to figure out what it was. Turned out, it was a pretty significant toxic mold exposure that I had back in 2015. But basically, I was one of these people that it followed me, you know, I moved I think four times between when that first exposure happened. And when I finally found out what it was, and I was at a time living in a moldy house, this house, in fact. So yeah, I mean, the way I talk about it is it very much has been a journey. And for those of us who are hypersensitive, you know, it's an ongoing journey. And you're forced to learn so much along the way. And I just felt like I needed to do something with that. Because I was forced to learn so much stuff that I never in a million years thought I would ever have to learn or want to learn or have any interest in learning. And it just it developed into a real passion project for me to help other people navigate this whole journey that I had to go through. You know, just with like, no map.

K

Kendra Seymour 02:45

Yeah, I'm, it's, it resonates with me, because I think once you go through this, and you realize how hard and overwhelming and confusing it is part of you wants to ensure that it like doesn't happen to anyone else. I know, that's part of the reason why so many of us came together to found Change The Air Foundation, because we want to make it just a little bit easier on people who are going through the process. Now, for your top 10 list. Your first one talks about failures of water-based appliances, what can you tell us about this? What are people looking for?

J

Jessica McQuade 03:21

Yeah, so this is all of your water based appliances, right? So it's your dishwasher, washing machine, the refrigerator water line, that's one that's really out of sight out of mind because mine's disconnected. So if you have, you know, a dispenser or water ice dispenser for your refrigerator, which 99% of them do these days, there's a water line, you know, there's that water has to come from somewhere, it's not coming from inside the refrigerator, it's coming from a water supply line, or you know a source, which typically is the kitchen sink, right. So mine runs as they often do under the floor under my hardwood floor from back there for drainage. So those are pretty common that those lines either behind the refrigerator, you know, the line comes disconnected somehow, or over time, you know, eventually, depending what those lines are made up of, or they can be more or less apt to degrade inside that floor cavity. And that can be a very tiny, slow leak that usually you'll see it in the ceiling, if you have access to the basement below the ceiling of the basement. Water heaters. So all of these appliances, they fail eventually, right? Every appliance is going to fail eventually. And when we have a water-based appliance that works with a supply line, or a giant tank full of water, it's kind of just a matter of time in terms of you know, so what can you do? I don't want to say that and just build this like, sense of panic. So like I'm just constantly waiting for that to happen, right? Because I think most of us who are in this space feel like that already. You know, I mean

monitoring, right? Whatever we can do to monitor and prevent. So things like appliance trays, they make dishwashers, I understand now that can that come with a tray built in underneath it, so that if it does it will set like an alarm or sensor built into it, so it'll shut itself off, if it senses a leak. If it does leak, it's not going to immediately hit the floor, you've got a little bit of play before it does. Same thing with washing machines, but trays under them. Water alarms, monitoring is your best bet on most things. And replacing you know, perhaps replace it if it's getting really old. Or even just check the manufacturer guidelines like at what point should you should you be replacing them? To stay ahead of that.

K

Kendra Seymour 05:55

For those who are interested in leak alarms, it's important to note like there's so many different kinds available, you don't need like the super fancy kinds, there's kinds that you know, talk to your smart devices and things like that. And if you're into that, and not concerned about EMFs you know, there's great options there. But then there's ones that are battery operated. My only word of advice, and I learned this the hard way is make sure you replace those batteries periodically. But they are very loud. You know, you wouldn't think something that is \$15-\$20 could be that noisy, but it they definitely you know, can grab your attention. So I love that. What about number two? You talk about roof leaks?

J

Jessica McQuade 06:37

Yeah, so roof leaks. Super common...not super common. But well, they are kind of super common. Typically, when we see a roof leak, it's usually a flashing issue. Not always, it could be the actual roofing damage to the roof. More commonly I see flashing around the chimney is a common one just because it's not done right. Every time I've seen flashing around the chimney fail, it's because it wasn't done right the first time. It wasn't done right originally. And you know, that's a bigger issue, right? That's a skill set in the industry kind of an issue. Also around boots, those, you know, can degrade over time. So typically, anywhere we have what we call a penetration, where there's a hole made in the roof, or something to go through it is where is where our weak points are. So in terms of prevention there, I mean, get your roof inspected, even if it's every year or two, you know, most roofers will come out and do that for free. Because there's a potential job in it for them. And you know, it can't hurt to do that or get up there yourself or have some, you know, trusted handyman, whoever you've got, who knows what they're looking for. Inspect regularly.

K

Kendra Seymour 07:53

Yeah, and if you have attic access, I know most people...we're gonna get to that later so we don't need to, to go there. But you know, there are things you can do as the homeowner that don't involve you going up on the roof because I know I'm a little bit of a klutz myself, that would be a dangerous combination. But everywhere else in my house, I'm comfortable going and checking. But I love that roof inspections, you know, periodically are a great idea. Especially you know, after if you're in an area that gets a lot of like severe weather or major storms, you're going to want to stay on top of that. Number three, you talked about exterior hose-related intrusions. What's going on there?

J

Jessica McQuade 08:28

Yeah, so I've seen a couple of these in my practice. And every single time it's been that somebody left the hose on. Somebody, somebody was out using the hose, forgot to turn it off. And it was just running, running, running sometimes for a day or two before it's noticed. And by that point, it has breached, you know, the foundation and made its way into the basement. Often it's finished basements. So we're seeing you know, drywall, carpet, all of that stuff getting impacted. Yeah, that's the number one. Sometimes, you know, they freeze in a pipe burst. Usually it's...the pipe is inside the house where it bursts. But yeah, number one is leaving the hose on.

K

Kendra Seymour 09:12

It's funny, you bring that up, because I have a funny story real quick. We uh, I was, my contractor was here and we were walking around the back of our house and we're, we're pretty close to our neighbors. And he's like, "Do you hear that?" And I was like, "What are you talking about?" He's like, "It's like running water." And so we kind of were looking around and we found the sound and my neighbor's hose was on right up against her foundation. And so I'm like, that's not right. I go running next door. And luckily she was home. And she's like, "Oh my god, I asked my five year old son to turn off the hose two days ago", and he hadn't turned it off all the way. And so she had run down and sure enough, they had water in that part of the basement and behind the wall. You know, people assume "Oh, my foundation will keep the water out". And that's not exactly how it works. And I know we'll get into some of that later about how water exterior issues can impact the interior of the home. But yeah, that's one of those ones that, the expensive lesson learned. Number four, you talk about tiled showers. What's going on? What do you see in there?

J

Jessica McQuade 10:16

Yeah, I mean, usually with these I mean, there's of course, like cleaning, grout, and a clog. That's one issue. But when I see failures, it's usually due to the original design, the original install. You know, we see tile that was put directly on drywall, which is, you know, that's just not the way to build a shower. But otherwise, if it was not an original sort of install design issue, cracks and gaps in the caulk, the grout as well. You know, neither of those lasts forever. I think it's just not on our radar as homeowners that we need to do anything about that. But grout needs to be resealed, generally speaking. I don't know anybody who does that. I've never met a homeowner who's like, "Oh yeah, I reseal my caulk in my showers every year." It's just not, nobody tells us this right? You don't get like the handbook for homeowners and make sure you're, you're resealing, resealing the grout in your shower. Caulk failures they, they just occur over time, you know. Caulk degrades, it's not meant to last forever. So just being preventative. Oh, yeah. So just being preventative about that. Paying attention, like look at your shower, does it not look good? You know, bring somebody in and handle that if it's not looking good. If those things are starting to look cracked and crumbly or moldy or peeling away, like, it's not meant to look like that. So, handle it.

K

Kendra Seymour 11:49

Yeah, I think that's like one of my favorite like prevention tips (and I even have my kids have

Yeah, I think too like one of my favorite like prevention tips (and I even have, my kids have been doing this since they were little) is you always want to remove the moisture from a bathroom as quickly as possible. So you know, a \$4 squeegee, you're squeegeeing the tile you want to...and then you know the rims, tub, and then pushing it all down the drain. So that you're not letting moisture sit on that tile, which, which can absorb in the grout moisture. And if you're in the position where you're redoing a bathroom or maybe you had to tear one out, waterproofing really occurs, you know, behind the tile. So there are systems and things that you can do that go behind the tile that will help with you know, any moisture that does get absorbed through the tile and grout and everything.

J Jessica McQuade 12:37

Oh, and you just reminded me of another favorite bathroom tip. You can also get a humidistat (it's, I think it's called like an in-wall humidity sensor) that you can replace the switch for your bathroom exhaust fan with this little humidistat that will trigger...you can set it to however you want it...to trigger at whatever percent humidity you want it to turn the fan on and it will do that automatically and you can set it for how long you want to stay on after it triggers. Which is kind of awesome for like kids' bathrooms, guests bathrooms, so you don't have to worry about that fan and whether it's being used or not to exhaust all that humidity while people are taking a shower. And that also actually leads me to another attic tip that I didn't mention for attics, which is bathroom exhaust fans need to be exhausted all the way to the outdoors. It's super common that those are exhausted they just terminate right in the attic, which is a terrible idea, and often you know, the cause of humidity and moisture and mold issues in attics.

K Kendra Seymour 13:43

Yeah, that is super important. You'd be...you know...I know you've seen it but the number of times we've seen, you know, all that humid air being dumped into the attic or like a wall cavity and then all that moisture is just hanging there, you know, allowing for that mold circle of life to, to flourish. So it's definitely a great tip, and another thing I'd add to that: your bathroom fan, it needs to be obviously used during and after the shower, but it should be properly sized for your bathroom. If you're in like a newer build or your home, sometimes people will go for the cheapest fan. And the you know, cubic feet, doesn't match your bathroom, and so it's not able to pull out enough moisture fast enough. I always get angry you know at my kids when they forget to turn on the fan because you see all that condensation on the mirror. They think it's fun but all that condensation is landing on your drywall and so you want to make sure it's properly sized and in good working order because the, those life...all appliances do have a lifespan and can stop working. So those are great tips, Jessica. I love that. All right, so five: crawl spaces. That...you say crawl space to a "moldy" and I think most of them their blood pressure goes up. So what are you seeing here?

J Jessica McQuade 15:02

Yeah, my own does because that was like, in this house, that was like the mold pit itself. So yeah, I have a beef with crawl spaces, generally speaking. So you know, lots of things that I see in there. Improper vapor barriers, probably takes the, takes number one spot. Takes the cake, if you will. Usually, what I see is just kind of a, a tarp, you know, like a, basically just a plastic sheeting thrown over the ground. It's kind of like, loosely covering soil. And, you know, soil is

more like natural habitat. So we know there's mold in soil. So that's essentially, if it's just draped over the soil, it's not sealed. Especially if there's an HVAC system in the crawlspace, and we have a vapor barrier that's just like tossed over the soil. Yeah, that's kind of a recipe for disaster for somebody who's hypersensitive. Other things I see down there, improper insulation, lack of ventilation, some places we need dehumidification. Also, drainage, depending on your, where you are, and what your your water table looks like, and your weather and all that stuff. Might need a sump pump, or other types of drainage systems to make sure there's no water getting in there. And then also see a lot of like, debris, like stuff down there. It's usually from when they built the house, like my house, they actually laid that, like, shaped the concrete of the foundation with cardboard. So my entire foundation in the crawlspace was lined with cardboard. Yeah, that was all. So I mean, weird stuff was done during the building process. And then also, there was just like, two by fours laying in there. Everything was moldy, you know, the more stuff that's in there, the more opportunity there is if the conditions are right, for that stuff to grow mold on it. And then we've got not only like, a moldy crawl space, you've got stuff in it, you know, adding to that. So yeah, also water intrusion. There's a lot that can happen with your water intrusion, due to, you know, gutters not being directed away from the home, foundation issues, grading issues. All of these things can end up in the crawl space.

J Jessica McQuade 15:02

Yeah, I mean, it's, it's for someone who tells you, "Oh, it's okay for a crawl space to be wet", no. Crawl spaces should be clean and dry because that air does impact the rest of your home. There's something called stack effect, so, the air moves from the bottom of your home, generally speaking, and can penetrate and work its way up into the other levels of the house. So I love that you touched on like the stuff down there, right? Because people also sometimes will store stuff in their crawl space, like stop doing that. It's just a recipe for disaster down the road. Is there someone who if, if they're concerned about their crawl space, you know, the average person probably doesn't want to be crawling down there. You can maybe peek down there. Who can they call that might go into your crawl space that can check things out for you if they're concerned?

J Jessica McQuade 18:26

Yeah, so there's a couple of different resources that I use from time to time depending on what the situation is, and what we have available to us wherever the home, wherever the home is located. So people that can go down there, like foundation repair companies, folks who do like basements systems usually are in the crawl space arena as well. Also, like, yeah, if you're really desperate, you don't have any of those kinds of people around, like a water damage restoration company, they get a lot of crawl spaces, because there's a lot of flooding happening. Flooding and mold happening in crawl spaces. So those folks are really used to going into crawl spaces and evaluating what might be going on in there. Mine actually, it was a leak detection company who figured out that my crawl space was a mold pit down in there. So any of those would be typically like good places to start and see if we can get somebody on top of that.

K Kendra Seymour 19:26

Yeah, if it's been a while. It's been a number of years since somebody has had an eye on your crawlspace, put that on your spring to-do list. Just stay ahead of it. I know sometimes it's scary.

You're like, if I look, then I'll know and I'd rather not know. But I promise you that the sooner you address some of these issues, the better off you're going to be. Let's go to the opposite side of the house. Number six. You talk about attics.

J Jessica McQuade 19:51

Yeah. So attics being attics, right. So, you know what we might see up here as we mentioned earlier, when we're talking about roof, roof leaks. The place you're going to see it first is going to be in an attic. So to your point about having a crawlspace looked at, if you can't do it yourself, get somebody in there to look at it. You're going to, you know, look up when you're in there. If water is going to come in, it's most likely (not always, because it could come in from the sides as well depending on what's going on)...but if it's, you know, coming from that roof, you're gonna see it first by looking up. When you're in the space you're gonna see water staining, darkening. You know, there'll be some pretty obvious signs usually, if that's happening. And then HVAC leaks. So where I am out in Colorado, we have a lot of HVAC systems in the attic. And we'll talk more about this later. But if there's air conditioning, you know, there's a coil up there that has a condensation line, there's water coming out of it. High efficiency furnaces, water. There's water being produced in your attic. Also, ventilation issues and proper insulation. Those two things can work together, baffles, things like this. Just having your insulation done properly, you know, and making sure that we're not blocking ventilation from happening properly. Those are the big ones up there.

K Kendra Seymour 21:27

Yeah, and to piggyback on what we said, with when it comes to crawl spaces, stop storing stuff up there. I know it's a tempting place to stick like a Christmas tree that you only use once a year, whatever. Those are, those are generally unconditioned spaces. You do not want to be sticking anything up there. And you know, it still baffles you know my mind that we are building homes and sticking HVACs and duct works in attics or crawl spaces where it makes it that much more difficult to be serviced and maintained. You know, that's something I hope we see change more as we you know, go forward, but it's not always something that a homeowner or renter has control over. So number seven let's talk about basements.

J Jessica McQuade 22:08

Yeah, I want to just add on to your storing in crawl spaces and attics because I see it in every single house that I see. If you absolutely must, like no cardboard, right? Like you can get plastic bins that have like an airtight seal on if you absolutely must. Please use plastic bins over cardboard boxes. Just want to say that...pet peeves of mine. Alright, so basements right. So basements being basements. Water goes down, so anything that happens above is likely going to make its way down to the basement. And then we have intrusions from, as we mentioned earlier with the crawlspace intrusions, from foundation issues, grading problems, gutters, window wells. So like, window wells that you know end up basically at the bottom of the window well is halfway down the wall in the finished basement. I've seen those fill up like swimming pools or they get a heavy, heavy rain and then that is an awful lot for the concrete wall...the porous concrete wall and the window...to have to compete with. So that's often a source, is basements right? So sump pump failures. If you have a sump pump, put an alarm on

that puppy and also consider like a backup battery, you know they make those, so that if you have a big storm and you lose power, what good is your sump pump going to do if you don't have electricity? So battery backup is a really good idea on those, and also like checking them. You know, again like in spring, put it on your twice a year list of things to just check to make sure it's working. Cause I've seen a lot of pumps where it just like, we didn't know it wasn't working. And so we have grand swings of water in the basement. HVAC again. So a very common location for them in the basement. Water heater again, like they're appliances that are producing water or a giant tank of water, or even tankless. You know, they have pressure relief valves. And things like these are all sources and if you're not in your basement very often that's where water alarms come in. As you mentioned earlier...and I agree in my living space, I use this, the cheap little hockey puck ones because they're very loud, especially in the middle of the night...but for like my crawl space, my attic. Those two spaces in particular, I use, I do use like the WiFi ones that will call me and text me obsessively if it senses a leak from my crawlspace and the attic. I feel like it's, it's worth taking a hit on the EMFs for those.

K

Kendra Seymour 25:00

Yeah, I mean, because you also have the challenge if you're out of town or something, and that's when you have a water related event, you're not going to hear a leak alarm. But then, you know, you may want to consider, you know, some people shut off their water main. And I think you have a tip for us later on that, before they go out of town to help avoid issues there. But I'll add to like, people with basements or really any foundation, they tend to think, "Oh, well, maybe I...my water heater is not in the basement". But your exterior grading and drainage. So if you're, you know, soil around your home is slanted towards your house, or your gutters aren't moving water away, that water comes towards your foundation, eventually, just like the hose situation we talked about earlier is going to have the potential to make its way into your basement. And if you have drywall or carpet, it's going to make it that much harder and take that much longer before you discover that. And I should have said at the top of this, because people are probably sitting here and they're a little overwhelmed listening about attics and crawl spaces and basements and checking behind their fridge. You can find a good indoor environmental professional (an IEP), which is a general term...it's not a certification, to do a thorough inspection of your entire home. And we have resources on our website, [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org](https://www.ChangeTheAirFoundation.org), that you can, you know, head on over to the website and look up that are going to help you find someone who can do a quality investigation of your home. And we have a list of questions. It's like 20 questions to ask when vetting an IEP. You can type that into the search and it should come up and may give you certifications and things to start looking for. But there are people here who can help you navigate this process, but you as the homeowner, as the renter, you are the first line of defense. So these are things that you can do. Sorry, that's my little PSA. Um, the next one, you talked about number eight..HVAC systems. What are we looking at there?

J

Jessica McQuade 26:59

I would say, lines. Almost always, it's so common that we get a leak from the condensate line. And like I mentioned earlier, you know, the central air or high efficiency furnace, which is super common, both of those are producing quite a bit of water. So yeah, that's like an issue that I see there. And again, like put a water alarm right in front of your HVAC, you know, or I have like in my attic one, I have, I have a little water alarm that comes with a little tab sensor. We have a

little tab in the tray that the system is centered on so that if it does make it into, it shouldn't even be making it into that tray. Because it should be going draining through condensate line. But if it makes it into the tray, something is malfunctioning. So I want to know about it immediately. I also, on my HVAC system (my HVAC guy was able to install, and they have them. It's not like an abnormal thing, like mine actually came with it) like a shutoff valve so that if it senses if the condensate line is malfunctioning and it's not draining properly, it will shut the system off, it's an auto shut off. So you'll know if you want to like double down, also put a water alarm in the tray just in case something else fails. And that's what I have. I have multiple fail safes, if you will, in place. Because it's in my attic, and I'm not up there.

K

Kendra Seymour 28:29

Yeah, and if you're only getting your, you know...some people never service their HVAC system. Don't do that. You need to be having it checked one or two times a year depending on the recommendation for the specific unit you have, but don't wait for those touch points in between. And certainly if you have a technician coming to service, you know, maybe before you turn on your AC in the spring, go down there, ask questions. You know, don't take too much of their time, but it's a chance to...if you're not sure where the condensate line is, ask them to point it out. So that's something you can monitor more regularly. So number nine, talk to us about sinks. Everyone's got one.

J

Jessica McQuade 29:08

Yeah, so leaks under sinks. I have yet to meet a house that doesn't have at least one sink, you know the platform underneath, that is water damaged. So it's super common, and it's super preventable. So top tips here would be I have those waterproof mats under every one of my sinks. They're very easy. They're on Amazon. There actually thin enough. Even like the sturdier ones. I was able to cut with scissors because I had pipes in the middle of my, or right underneath, and I was thinking "How am I going to do this?" It really wasn't that hard, you know, maybe like a little X, put a line to it. And then it pretty much closed back up. Once I put it in there. It's good enough because I also have a water alarm on top of that tray. So I'm going to get notified immediately, and I'm going to prevent damage to the bottom of my cabinet. So yeah, that's a biggie. It's and also like, don't stuff your, you know, cabinet under there with stuff because that stuff is going to like absorb a lot, especially if it's a paper towels and towels, things like that they're going to absorb water. And by the time you find out there's a leak, it's not going to be good.

K

Kendra Seymour 30:29

Yeah, I think too people tend to like collect, like cleaning products maybe they've stopped using or personal care products, and they're all like half finished, and they're sitting back there and expired. Like, if you haven't this spring, pull out everything from underneath your sink. You should be doing that periodically anyways to check for leaks. But maybe it's time to, you know, recycle or trash some of the products that you aren't using anymore. That way you have a better visual, but I love that. I have the trays too under mine with like the high lip, and water alarms under every sink. Because that's just an easy one that you can do. And it's a pretty affordable intervention as well.

J Jessica McQuade 31:08

One other thing I'll add is put your stuff in trays, you know, like little plastic bins or trays. It's nice for organization purposes, but also like, it just helps organize it a little bit better so that you can put the water alarm where it's going to get hit first. And still have some stuff under there, but it's semi protected.

K Kendra Seymour 31:28

Yeah, I love that. So let's bring it home with number 10. Talk to us about windows and doors. Again...

J Jessica McQuade 31:35

Yeah, I mean, yes, sorry. Obvious one, right? Windows and doors. They're penetrations on the building envelope. They're holes in your house. So if they're not, you know, installed, maintained...a lot of things again here that like we're never taught as homeowners. How to monitor and preventatively maintain our house, and windows and doors are pretty darn important to us. There's a lot of them. And they're an entry point for moisture and water. You know, I had a situation in my, my primary bedroom. Snow was building up, there's a, like a balcony. So the door that goes out to the balcony, snow was building up outside. And the threshold for the door had apparently been installed backwards. So snow would build up outside, melt onto the threshold and then drain into like the wall cavity. You know, that was an install problem. And then also, you know, same thing like windows are caulked around there and on the outside. And that caulk is subjected to the elements where I live. It's, you know, all my south facing windows, like the caulk is all degrading, and coming, you know, cracking, leaving these big gaps around my windows. Like you got to stay on top of that stuff. Right? It's gonna rain. Yeah, so yeah, just generally speaking, windows and doors.

K Kendra Seymour 33:10

Are there any tools a homeowner can use? Like, obviously, if I can see standing water. But what am I looking for, though? If it's something, if it's behind the wall around the window, maybe underneath the floor by the door? Is there anything that the average person can, can do to help them besides looking for the obvious?

J Jessica McQuade 33:28

It's yeah, it's really about monitoring, maintaining, and bringing someone in. Like, if you don't know what you're looking for or what you're looking at. Like, bring in a window professional. You know a window...they're usually one in the same who do windows, windows and doors, typically. Bring them in, have them take a look around and go with them. Like you mentioned with your HVAC, like, I, anytime I have any sort of, you know, contractor professional coming into my house, and I warn them that I'm going to be following them around like a puppy, asking them a bunch of questions. Because it's an opportunity. Every time you have a professional in

your home, it's an opportunity to learn about your home. And frankly, as a homeowner, like it's your responsibility to understand your home and no one tells us that. But like if you're not doing that, who is for you, you know what I mean? Like, it's just one of these huge missed opportunities for all of us, myself included, lessons learned over and over again, about like, no one's gonna look out for me and my house other than you. So like, it is my job. I consider it part of my job to like understand that house and know what I need to be looking for. You know, it's it's important.

K

Kendra Seymour 34:49

I love that I've said that for years. No one will care about your health or your home as much as you. And so that's why it's all about being your own advocate. And all the resources we provide, and you know, hopefully move people towards understanding the home a little bit more. And I love that you bring that up. Now you actually have a bonus one for us. And it...do you want to tell us, or should I tee it up?

J

Jessica McQuade 35:08

Haha! Whatever you'd like. You can tee it up.

K

Kendra Seymour 35:12

All right. So "improperly executed water damage restoration". What does that mean? Oh my goodness,

J

Jessica McQuade 35:19

Oh, man, so many of these. So I see these often. And more often than I would like, for sure. You know, we're talking about all these opportunities with my list here for water damage to occur and how we can prevent it. But some things are not preventable, right? Sometimes there's a failure that we didn't answer...we didn't, we couldn't prevent. Sometimes acts of nature, right? We were talking earlier about, you know...and I have a client who this happened to as well. A tree fell on the house, and it's raining into their house. There's nothing they could have done to prevent that, you know. Or water intrusion in the basement. It was just like some sort of massive flooding event. And no matter what, there's nothing to do to stay ahead of it. So the...yeah, what I see often is that water damage was not handled properly, either by a water damage restoration company, who didn't handle it properly, which definitely happens. Or the homeowner thinking like, "Oh, let me just like, mop this up with towels and call it a day". But if building materials have gotten wet, it's not that simple. You know, there needs to be more aggressive handling of the situation. So yeah, it's just, I see, like, floods or things, you know, major events that happen. And it was just underestimated, right? Because it's common, you can go, "Oh, the toilet overflowed, everybody's toilet overflows. Oh, this thing that happened, just clean it up, throw a fan on it for a few days." And, you know, maybe that might be enough, depending on how significant of an event and what was affected, what got wet, and how wet and yada, yada. But it's just very, very common that we underestimate the damage that a simple water event can cause and usually it's, I'm getting that, you know, people are coming to

me months or years later: "So I wonder, would it be when that one time that this happened, and we handled it this way?" Or, "You know, we did have this company come in and this is what they did." And looking back at it, I'm saying they didn't do enough. They didn't do it right. So not only can we ourselves do it wrong, like I said earlier, like sometimes we can rely on companies and think that this is their expertise and trust that it's been done right. And sometimes it hasn't. And that goes back to all of your, I'll let you speak to it, you know, but all of the effort that you are putting out there in terms of educating consumers on how to properly vet and understand what should be done, because we kind of have to, kind of have to make sure, right? Got to make sure it's being done right in your home.

K

Kendra Seymour 38:13

Well, and I think it's important too, that people listening...the clock starts the moment the building material gets wet, not the moment the restoration company shows up a day or two later or not the moment the mold starts becoming visible. It starts the moment, the...the water, you know, occurs. So you have that 24 to 48 hours, and the material needs to be dry within that time. So I think sometimes people, you know, they start drying the materials, and not realizing maybe they're not using enough to, to dry the material out fast enough. And so the material's wet for 5, 6, 7 days, or they only run the fans for 48 hours, and they're like it feels dry. But dry is a measurement. And that's where something like a moisture meter, which you can get at, you know, online and most building type places (we don't name specific places). But you know, a homeowner can have one...there's pin and pinless. But the IEP or restoration company you're working with, ask them to confirm that the material is dry from the center. And ask them for the number, right? Building materials, they have different moisture content. And so you know, you want to know that it is in fact dry and you know what your risk is with the amount of time it takes to dry out that, that material. Because I think to your other point, you know, people will also just clean up what's on the surface and they don't think about what's below because, you know, not only do we underestimate water, I think we we tend to not understand quite how far it can go, right? Like my cousin had a water leak with her washing machine and they dealt with it on the main floor. But the water had already traveled down into the basement. And it was a year when they were exploring other issues before they discovered and lo and behold, it, you know, it was wet long enough for mold to grow. So that's a great, great tip. Now you, you have some, you had a great client story. And we have a few minutes. I was wondering if you could tell us about that, because it's very empowering, because things happen. But it doesn't have to be the end of the world. So what happened to your client recently?

J

Jessica McQuade 40:35

Yeah, so this was just a few weeks ago, we had a cold snap here in Colorado. It was below zero for a couple days. So of course, we all had our radar on. You know like, "Where's there going to be a pipe burst?" So I had a client, give me a call. And she said, she, she's been through mold before. She knows she's hypersensitive, she's in her, you know, safe home. And she has been doing well for a couple of years. And she came downstairs, walked into her kitchen and heard, you know, like, the sound of water running. And she didn't have anything running. So she realized very quickly, it was coming from like, you know, in a wall behind the kitchen cabinet. And she ran and turned off her water. She turned off the water main to the home, because she didn't know exactly what the source was or what was happening. But she knew enough to

know, hey if it's coming from like a supply line of some sort, turning off the water main will stop that. And also, she knew where her water was, and she knew how to turn it off. Now she admitted that she was like, it was terrifying to actually take that step. But you know, I mean, you got to do it. And she was right. Like she turned it off. It stopped the source of the water. She got a plumber in, it was a leak in a pipe that had frozen in the wall, in the kitchen wall behind the cabinet that went out to the hose bib. So it had frozen in, in the wall, because it was so cold outside, you know, froze in the wall. And then it was thawing out because it had warmed up. It's when it warms up usually that we see the issue because that's when it thaws, that's where it goes typically. But the the lesson there was that she knew her house, right? She knew what her...and I say this all the time, like, know your home, know what it sounds like, know what it looks like, know what it smells like. Like those things alone. Like notice when...because the better you know it, the more you're going to notice when something is out of sorts, right? She heard something that was like "This is not a normal sound." So yeah, that's the lesson learned, like she knew her house. And she knew well enough that it didn't seem right. And she was able to take action immediately. We did bring a you know, a remediator out there, we were checking everything out. And she did not have to do anything. Like she took preventative measures, she... there was water in the cabinet that she could see. So she dried that. She put a fan on it and a heater, like a space heater. And with our climate, it's so so dry here in the winter, it did dry out in time. And we got a remediator out there the next morning. They got under there and checked it with moisture meters, everything was dry and the plumber fixed the problem. And she moved on with her life within like two days. She did not have to deal. It was not this, like huge...it didn't turn into this huge ordeal. And that was also something that was really nice for her that she got to experience a water event gone right. You know, and that was because of her actions. So it doesn't always have to be like this super scary, "Oh my God, my life is over!" to like, you know, move out and throw away everything I own, and all this stuff like it can be a minor event.

K

Kendra Seymour 44:10

Yeah, and I think that's important for people to hear too. If you're if you know your home and you can be proactive and address it quickly, it doesn't have to feel like the end of the world. It doesn't have to. Yeah, you're going to spend a little money right? But it's going to pale in comparison to what you would have spent, you know, check...pulling up that drywall and replacing it is going to be far cheaper than leaving it there and having to remediate and everything else down the road. This is a great segue as we close though because you talk about having a plan. So is there anything you want to say to people listening about having a plan in place?

J

Jessica McQuade 44:44

Yeah, I think that's really important, like, what she did. I'm sure she had at some point played it out in her mind like when she familiarized herself with "Where's my water main? How do I turn it off?", she was doing what we're about to talk about. She was making a plan, right? An emergency plan. Or like, what would I do "if". Something I did...like I, you know, a couple years ago...I brought in a handyman, and I said, "Just walk through my house with me and show me (I've done it with a plumber too), show me how to turn everything off. And let's strategize. Like, let's go to every water source and just strategize for like, what could go wrong? And what would I do about it in that case? Right? So my washing machine is leaking...what do I do?" Well,

there's a supply line right there for cold and hot, right? I'm gonna turn those off, I'm going to get towels, I'm gonna get a shop-vac, you know, that I can wet-vac the water out. Like, we talked through every detail of like, what would my plan be for this? And that was really helpful for me just in terms of like, having peace of mind, and trusting myself and trusting my house to know that, like, we're gonna figure this out. We're gonna, I'm gonna stay on top of things, I'm going to monitor, I'm going to understand how my house works. And I'm going to be an empowered homeowner, you know. I'm going to know what to do in case of each of these, like, more common or obvious scenarios. Of course, things can happen, we don't anticipate. But the more we like, exercise that muscle of strategizing and developing a plan, and being comfortable with like taking action that we normally wouldn't do. You know like, it's scary to admit, you know, like, if you think about like, "Oh, I'm gonna go under my sink and like, turn a valve on a pipe and hope it does what it (I'm not a plumber, you know) hope it does what it's supposed to do. What if something else happens, right? But the more you're prepared for that, like, the less scary it is, and the more apt you are to be able to like take action when you need to.

K

Kendra Seymour 46:47

Yeah, that is so, so important, because it is overwhelming. It's not, you know, how you want to spend your time, I'm sure, thinking you know about these. But it's so important, and you won't regret it in the long run. So I have a challenge for everyone listening, based on this. If you do nothing else (and I hope you go through these areas that she's recommending) I encourage you to figure out how to shut off the main water line to your home in the event of an emergency. Figure out where that is. Make that...if it's the only thing you can handle and tackle right now...make that your goal. Do you know how to turn off your water in the event of an emergency? Pipes leaking, or whatever it may be? It's a good thing for all of us to know. So Jessica, thank you so much for being here. I can't wait...you know...I think we talked about maybe doing some more, more interviews in the future, because you always have such great tips. But if people wanted to get into contact with you, or they had questions, how could they do that?

J

Jessica McQuade 47:44

Yeah, so my website is MoldMentorLLC.com. I'm also on Facebook and Instagram, and I try and post, you know, tips and experiences and stories and all sorts of fun stuff.

K

Kendra Seymour 47:59

Yeah, wonderful. And for everyone listening, do us a favor. If you found this interview helpful, head on over to ChangeTheAirFoundation.org and sign up for our newsletter, because it really is the best way to get great interviews like this directly to your inbox. Thank you so much, and we'll see you next time.