



Mold Remediation Part 2: What You Need to Know Before You Remediate

MP

Michael Pinto

0:00

This is actually the outer edge of a spore at about 100,000 magnification, and you can see those little droplets on it. And initially, sometimes people think, well, that's just condensation or something. But no, that's actually the chemicals that are being produced by the mold itself, and both the clear ones and the brown ones to the left there, are actual mycotoxins. That is, molds create poisons that are being produced.

KS

Kendra Seymour

0:44

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And welcome to Remediation 101, a Change the Air Foundation mini class series. My name is Kendra Seymour, and I'm joined today by the brilliant Michael Pinto, who's going to take us through part two of our series. We're going to be talking about what you need to know before you begin. And trust me when I say you don't want to skip this episode, because there are a lot of things that pass, as I'm going to say, "remediation", that may be ineffective, insufficient, and even unsafe. And we want to protect you, and your health, and your home, and your checkbook even. So that said, thank you so much, Michael for joining us today.

MP

Michael Pinto

1:50

Well, what a blessing to be here. Thank you Kendra for inviting me.

KS

Kendra Seymour

1:54

Now for those who don't know Michael yet, we're very fortunate at Change the Air Foundation, because he's actually one of our Strategic Advisors. So his full bio can actually

be found on our website, ChangeTheAirFoundation.org. So, I'm not going to read it now, but I do want to highlight that he has been in the industry for over 40 years, providing professional safety and industrial hygiene services related to all sorts of indoor environmental issues. He has extensive expertise, passion, and compassion. And those are just a few of the reasons why he's been considered an industry leader for as long as he has, and is so well respected by his colleagues, and those that know him. So, I hope I summed that up pretty well Michael. Is there anything you want to add to that?

MP

Michael Pinto

2:32

I am embarrassed by your accolades, and I appreciate it very much. And yes, I've been doing this a long time, and I want to share that wisdom.

KS

Kendra Seymour

2:42

Love it. Let's jump right in.

MP

Michael Pinto

2:43

Well, we brought up the introductory slide here that you're going to see on all of the different programs in this series, and you can see my name there at the bottom. But the important thing, really, is to start with this. And any of the sessions that I host, you're going to see this slide at the beginning, because I feel it's just so important for people to understand when you're dealing with a water-damage building that has mold in it, there's so many different things that are going on, that the occupants, the sensitized individual, can easily be overwhelmed. And by seeing it in front of you, a lot of times this helps our clients just understand it to the point that, "Okay, I don't have to deal with everything all at once. I can take it a section at a time. And when I'm talking to a contractor, okay, I'm dealing with a section down at the bottom under environmental, that talks about potentially containment source removal. Or there's a different contractor who's going to be cleaning my HVAC system, so I can now focus on that block of information, and then deal with that, rather than just being, feeling like I'm being overwhelmed all the time." And up on the upper right there, you can see the medical side of it—that is so important. That's not something that I do. I'm not a doctor. I don't pretend to be one, but it's so important that you interface with a good medical professional who understands what's going on, and then can match your body treatment with what you're doing to treat the environment. The other things along the top, they shouldn't be ignored, although, again, those aren't areas of expertise specifically for me. But, just even the social issues, and trying to find team members who can help you, and friends, and colleagues, individuals that will pray for you as you go through this. Finding financial resources, even if it means getting a home improvement loan, and convincing somebody that it's just as important to clean your home as it is to put in the new kitchen, or do a remodel of the windows, or something like that, so that you can secure the right financial resources. And of course, the legal side. But really what we're going to be talking about throughout the mini program is all the different aspects of the environmental side of things, which is down at the bottom, so the investigation, and etc.

What today's discussion is all about, is just putting that environmental information down there at the bottom in a proper perspective.

So let's just start with some basics. There is a mold remediation standard that you'll hear about. If you're just getting into this, you may not have heard it yet, but as you get into dealing with a mold and just addressing what you need to do on the environmental side, as a sensitized individual, you'll hear about this IICRC S520 Standard, And in that particular voluntary standard, it's a standard, but it's not like a government standard. So, basically, it's just voluntary guidance from industry professionals to other industry professionals. And in there, it talks about the three basic conditions that we see in a home or a building. Condition one is what they call normal fungal ecology. That's just a understanding that there is some outside to inside movement of spores and things, and so that you're never going to have a mold or spore-free home. That's just, and when the contractors come in and potentially tell you that it's going to be spore-free when you're done, or it's going to be mold-free—that is a sure sign that you want to step back and ask a few more questions, because that's not what you're going to end up with. You're going to end up with a house that is normal. Condition two, there you can see that's settled spores. That's going to be things that come from actual growth, which is a condition three. So you can get into those, you can see the S520 Standard online, and you can look at those definitions yourself.

What I want to focus on here, for the sensitized individual, is that too often, the condition two, the area that the voluntary standard defines as “spores that have been distributed to the areas of the house from the colonies that are growing somewhere”, oftentimes, is not addressed as part of remediation. Remediation contractors tend to focus on, “Okay, I can see it. There's a visible mold.” Or even if they can't see it, it's hidden behind the wall. “We're going to open up that wall. We're going to take out all of the actual moldy material...” Which is good. They're going to do all that, but they isolate that area, they take that out, they clean their isolated area, and then they say, “We're done. And look, we took samples inside our contained work area, and there was a really clean, and so you're going to be great. Everything's going to be good.” And for a good percentage of the population, that's going to be true. For the sensitized individual, that's not enough, because that mold that was already there, not necessarily based on what the remediation contractor did, they didn't necessarily, if they did a good job, they didn't spread it around, but it's already been spread. Just by the fact that the colonies were growing, and the mold spores disperse on the air currents, and all sorts of things that are going on.

So, many times that aspect of the problem isn't identified, and isn't treated as part of mold remediation. And then the person goes through, they get the remediation done, and then they say, “Well, how come I'm not feeling any better? How come my medical markers aren't improving in things?” And part of that is because the scope of the work wasn't big enough. You took care of the colonies of the mold, and that's great. It's a wonderful start, but if you didn't take care of everything else that's spread around, then it's not comprehensive enough, and you're not going to have the results that you need as a sensitized individual. So, again, I think it's really important here, and I use the term “normal” in quotes there. I'm not trying to be derogatory toward any of my sensitized individual clients, but I just want everybody to understand, in the mold remediation field, there's still a small percentage of

contractors that actually understand how to deal with sensitized individuals. And so most of the contractors are doing, you know, standard work, what I call, you know, for normal occupants, people who aren't sensitized. And you know, if they're a good contractor, they're going to get it back to that condition one. In other words, it's going to "normal" in your house. It's going to reflect what's going on outside, and maybe a few other things, but not enough to bother the regular person.

The sensitized independent individual, however, that's not good enough. You're just, you're not going to make progress in most cases if that's the standard you're using at the end of your work. You have to have a cleaner than normal environment. And one of the things that we do, and have done, is utilize a post-remediation criteria that is much more aggressive than going back to normal. And again, that's based on medical data, and also public perception, and just experience with the sensitized individuals. And there's some of the criteria that we use for post-remediation, but we'll talk about that a little bit more in some of the later sessions here, so we're not going to spend too much time getting into that. What I do want to also point out, however, is all of that is for naught, even if you have a great contractor, even if the scope is wide enough, even if you take care of all the source material, which is the colonies, and then clean your whole house, if you don't fix the water leaks or whatever moisture source, it might just be high humidity. It could be foundation leaks. There's a picture here, that just, there's 20 different things it could be, right? But if you don't understand where the water is coming from, and we don't control the moisture in that house, or in that structure. Then that statement, the mold will return. It doesn't matter how good we take care of it. It doesn't matter what chemistry you spray afterwards. It doesn't matter what you fog or, you know, anything else that you do. If there's moisture in the house long enough, there will be mold. And that's the first thing that people have to accept, is that we can get the house perfect today, but we also have to think about what's going to happen with it down the road, and how do we keep it that way?

MP

Michael Pinto

12:35

So, this is what I was talking about previously in terms of what most contractors think remediation is, and I would say this picture is a pretty good picture. I mean, they've got it isolated, you can see there's a number of these big machines with the hoses going from them, that's exhausting the air to the outer doors. There's people in there, kind of, with suits and things, that are doing the work, and that should be the way it's done. They should isolate the work area. They should put it under negative pressure, which is what those air filtration devices are doing. And then, they should remove the mold in a very careful and controlled way. And I do want to point out that is not demolition, alright? Demolition is just go in and rip the crap out. Mold removal is controlled removal, and doing it in such a way that you're not just spreading everything all over. And that last item on this slide, I, you know, put this in the original version of the mold remediation textbook, and I continue to emphasize this to anyone that I talk to: you do remediation poorly, and it's going to...you're going to be in a much worse situation than if you even never had the remediation in the first place. And that's basically what they're going to do, is they're just going to spread the mold everywhere. And so now, instead of having it in a contained area, where we can

isolate it and control it, we've just pushed it everywhere. Now we're going to end up doing full-scale remediation of everything.

I also want to point out that, and you'll hear some of this in other sessions of this set of training, and when it comes to this, I believe it's David Myrick that's going to be the expert that's going to be taking you through this. He's a colleague and a friend. He's going to do a great job with this. And he's going to talk to you as a remediation contractor about how this work should be done. And some of the things he'll talk about, he'll use this really kind of weird term called the HEPA-sandwich. And this has been an approach that's been used for a long time in the industry, almost 25 years now, and that just says that it's a very defined set of procedures. We HEPA vacuum, and then we damp wipe, and then we HEPA vacuum again. And that has worked really well. For sensitized individuals, however, and particularly with folks who have mycotoxin poisoning, we're adjusting that procedure just a little bit, and I'm sure David will talk about this. We now call it the HEPA-pizza. We HEPA vacuum everything—that's a vacuum that's got very dense filters on it, so the spores don't get out once they get vacuumed up. And then we damp wipe. And then we come back, and instead of HEPA vacuum again...which is kind of where the sandwich idea comes from. We come back with a dry microfiber wipe, and we do a detailed wipe down of all the different surfaces. But David will explain that in great detail.

So, the point of all of that, and the reason that you go through all the effort to have a HEPA-sandwich done, or HEPA-pizza done...maybe a HEPA-sandwich inside the work area, and HEPA-pizza on the rest of the areas of the house—that are just now contaminated with what we call that condition two. It is because it is so important that we get rid of not just the visible stuff, not just those black colonies we can see. But here's a magnified picture of a spore on a piece of fabric, I believe that is a towel or something. It's tiny. You can't see it. That's why they're called microscopic. And the colonies of the visible part with the spores, and the small fragments, and even the poisons that come from it, the mycotoxins...we're going to be talking about later. All of those are so small you would need a microscope to even see them, and yet, they have to be removed. And so, we have to have techniques and processes that does that for us.

Now, when it gets down to mycotoxins, and this is a really cool photo, this is actually the outer edge of a spore at about 100,000 magnification, and you can see those little droplets on it. And initially, sometimes people think, "Well, that's just condensation or something." But no, that's actually the chemicals that are being produced by the mold itself. And both the clear ones, and the brown ones to the left there, are actual mycotoxins, that is, mold created poisons that are being produced in the...and I love this, because the official term is exuded. It's exuded from the spores. And so, if you can't find humor in anything in the mold remediation industry, just say that three times fast, and it'll just make you smile. But anyway, the actual chemicals, the actual poisons, are being exuded from those spores and things. And then they end up moving from the spores, to dust particles and surfaces. And so, it's important that even all of those chemicals get removed, and there's different ways that we do that. You can see there, different sorts of cleaners that have acids, and oxidizers in them, and things, should actually be used in your mold remediation process, when you're doing the whole house cleaning to get rid of those mycotoxins.

Now, this always bothers me, but it's important for me to share this with people, and that is, that, too many people who claim to be restoration or mold remediation contractors, will talk to potential clients, even people that are sensitized—and as a matter of fact, a lot of them are preying with, p-r-e-y, on the sensitized clients and saying, “Oh, this is the only way that it's going to take care of the problems in your house. We're going to come in with our magic juice.” And I use that term in a derogatory fashion on purpose, because it's, that's almost how they're selling it, like some sort of magic. And the other term you'll hear in the industry is ‘spray and pray’. “We're just going to take our stuff and we're going to spray it over, and then you fill in the blank there, we're going to fog it, we're going to gas it. We're going to do this. We're going to do that.” Now, that may be necessary somewhere along the line, as an adjunct to what you're doing in terms of real remediation. But when the advertisements, as you can see here, just taken from an Ad, is that you're going to increase your profits by 60, or 70, or 80% talking to the contractor. What does that mean? The way I read that, is that you're going to take advantage of your client by 60, 70, or 80%. And it also probably means you're going to do a 60, 70, or 80% worse job, instead of doing it the way that you're supposed to. But again, I'll let David and some of the other experts in different sessions on the program here address some of that.

Now, for the individuals who would think to themselves, “If there's really that spray and pray approach, or there's people that are taking advantage of the sensitized individuals and other clients, how come there aren't some sort of rules to prevent that?” And the answer is, there isn't, okay. And again, I could get into long discussion. I'm not necessarily sure that state regulations or federal regulations is the way to go anyway, because it just gives people a way to figure out how to be dishonest. If they're dishonest, they're going to be dishonest. You know, we've got a tax system, and people pay their taxes or people cheat on their taxes. I mean, it's kind of one thing or another. And if you have mold rules, people follow the rules, or they don't follow the rules. And since the people who make the rules, a lot of times don't understand what they're doing when they write the rules, it oftentimes just puts the people who want to comply in a worse situation, because they have to follow some, and I'm just going to say it, sometimes just silly state rules, instead of the people who are writing the rules actually understanding what is best for the industry. The other thing that will happen, and I'll say this specifically, with Texas, they write the rules, and then it's such a challenge to write the rules, they never get changed. So the Texas rules have been in place as of the taping of this program, for 22 years, and they have not been adjusted. And the industry has changed in 22 years, believe me. So again, I think what it means is that with a majority of the country not having rules in place anyway, and the ones that do have rules, probably, you know, either old or not very good at all.

MP

Michael Pinto

22:08

The thought process is, you have to take care of your, you have to be your own best advocate, is essentially what I'm saying here. You need to know enough, that when you can talk to a contractor, or talk to an inspector, and they start talking things, that you can immediately throw the b.s. flag and say, “Wait a minute. What do you—what are you talking about? That you're just going to fog this and it's all going to take care of it, and it's going to dissolve it? It's all going to go away? There won't be anything left?” I mean that's,

quite honestly, it's bogus. And I'm not trying to pick on anyone, or any company, or anything like that. What I am saying is that to do remediation is hard work, and yes, I understand that people are always coming up with new ideas, and new advancements, and everything. And that's why I think it's so important for anybody who's in this environment—is a sensitized individual, to have a network of helpers. To be able to call Change the Air Foundation and say, “Is there somebody I can talk to that can help me with this question? Can I go through your Frequently Asked Questions, and find an answer to some of these things that these people are saying that just don't make sense to me?” And the resources are out there. The problem is, there's so much information. How do you separate the good information from the bad information, and then how do you get it to a point where you can actually use it? And hopefully that's what this series does for you. And more importantly, hopefully that's what Change the Air Foundation is doing for everyone, by moving us in that direction. Where they can kind of sort through the information, validate it, and then share the best information with people. And at the same time, what that means is, “Okay, we're sharing good stuff, but we're also throwing out and keeping you from having to look at the bad stuff. And by not confusing you with the bad stuff, that makes the good stuff all that more important.” So with that, Kendra, I'll let you talk to the folks about what's left in the series here.

KS

Kendra Seymour

24:33

Yeah. So thank you so much for that, Michael. And you know, we do have a lot in store for you guys. These are going to be short segments that are going to take you through, you know, the specifics. Michael's going to be joining us next to talk about the mold sensitized client, and then we are going to move on to those individual components of the remediation process. So you're definitely going to want to stay with us through the whole series. And if you don't want to miss any of that, head on over to ChangeTheAirFoundation.org, and sign up for our newsletter, because it really is the best way to stay up to date on all the great resources and interviews that we have coming your way. Plus, as a bonus, we are going to be releasing a mold remediation guide for you, exclusively to those people who sign up to our newsletter, and it's going to take you through the remediation process. So many great pictures and visuals. I promise you're going to want this as a reference tool as you go through this process. So Michael, thank you so much for being here.

MP

Michael Pinto

25:33

It's always my pleasure to speak with you, and more importantly, to share with all of the people who need this information, that then turned to Change the Air Foundation. You guys do such a great job.

KS

Kendra Seymour

25:44

Thank you. Everyone, we'll see you next time for part three. Have a great rest of your day.