



Avoiding Inspection Pitfalls: Tips from an Indoor Environmental Pro With John Skelly

JS

John Skelly

0:00

And then I also found, you know, three bathrooms that had tile and grout showers over green board, which is essentially paper-backed, moisture-resistant, mold food, right? That they used for about 40 years in showers. And moisture gets behind eight out of ten showers I put my meter on.

KS

Kendra Seymour

0:22

Hello, and welcome to *Your Indoor Air* podcast brought to you by Change the Air Foundation. My name is Kendra Seymour, and today I'm joined by John Skelly. And we're going to be talking about the importance of finding a good Indoor Environmental Professional (or an IEP): what that person does; some of the common pitfalls you might face when it comes to inspections and remediations; and how you, you know, might even go about prioritizing problem areas, you know, in your home based on severity and some other tips that John's going to share with us today. There's so much great information, and so I think anyone listening, whether you're a homeowner or renter, you're going to walk away today with some practical tips. Now, before I tell you a little bit about John and welcome him, I do want to take a moment to thank two of our sponsors, M.V. Restorations and Home Safe Mold Inspectors of NWA. And we so appreciate these companies, not just for the work that they do, but for their generosity. Because it's what helps keep our resources free, makes our policy and advocacy work possible, and, you know, supports all of our research grants. So, a huge thank you to those sponsors. And you can learn more about them if you head on over to ChangeTheAirFoundation.org, and click on our Corporate Partners tab. So that said, John, thank you so much for being here.

JS

John Skelly

1:30

Thank you. Thank you so much for having me. I just...I want to applaud you for everything you've been doing, just with the, you know, the Facebook groups and, you know, you and your colleagues with this Change the Air Foundation. And I just want to thank you for allowing me to be a part of what you're doing, you know, so I'm truly grateful to be here.

KS

Kendra Seymour

1:49

Thank you, and you as well. We actually connected over Facebook, and I know you're doing a lot to help people. And I know it's important to you that people live in healthy homes and breathe safe indoor air, and so we're all about that. So, for those listening, if you don't know John yet, he is a Council certified Indoor Environmental Consultant. He's a New York State mold assessor and a US EPA lead and asbestos inspector. He began his career in the environmental mold, water damage, and air duct cleaning industry in 2003, and he is also the owner and operator of HNST Mold Inspections.

So, you've been in business a long time. I know you've seen a lot. I know today we're gonna talk about some of the, you know...some specific, actual, real-world scenarios that you've seen. So, I'm excited to jump in. But for anyone listening, maybe they're newer to mold. And I remember being here once upon a time when I first found mold and water damage. I thought I was supposed to call a mold remediation company first, and then I learned about this amazing person, an Indoor Environmental Professional (or an IEP for short), and what they do. So, can you kind of orient everyone and kind of tell us, like, what is an IEP and what does a good one do?

JS

John Skelly

2:59

Okay, yeah, sure. So, an IEP is...it's a designation. It's not a certification of any kind. And it's, unfortunately, it's not a gauge of anyone's experience, you know, good or bad. You know, I became an IEP back in 2010 after a two-day class, you know? Now I did have five years of practical, hands-on remediation experience, you know, behind me. But, you know, not all IEPs are made the same, right?

KS

Kendra Seymour

3:30

Amen. We say that all the time at the foundation, yeah.

JS

John Skelly

3:32

Yeah. So, it's...it can be very challenging to kind of navigate, you know, and find who is good, who is not so good. And you know, again, what you're doing, you know, with the foundation, is empowering people, giving them the information, the, you know, the questions to ask. You know, I love when a...when a potential client interviews me. I mean, because all my interviews and client vets, vet me over the phone, you know? And I love when they have their list of questions, right? And you can sense the confidence that they have, you know, on the other side of the phone, because they have that information to go with, you know, to ask you and try to interview you.

So, I mean, a good IEP, you know, really has—should have—the ability to be able to, you know, properly diagnose a home. You know, they should ideally be versed in multiple facets of the indoor environment. You know, and it's not to knock a two-day certification or

two-day class. I mean, look, we all have to start somewhere, right? You know? But, you know, understand mechanical systems, understand ventilation, drainage, you know, all because there's so many moving parts in a house. And often, a homeowner doesn't understand many of these, you know, components. And so, for a good IEP, to be able to help the customer not only understand that they have mold, but why they have mold, why they have an indoor air quality problem. You know, what is the remedy and what is the solution? What are your preventative measures? You know? So those are some of the things I think that, you know, really make a good IEP.

KS

Kendra Seymour

5:05

Yeah, no, I think you hit the nail on the head with so many points that we talk about a lot at the foundation. And if anyone has gone to our Start Here tab under our Resources, we talk about exactly what you said: that you know, unfortunately, not all, all of them are created equal. Because sometimes we see (and I know I have this kind of inspector once upon a time, and I see this) they come in, and they'll just take a couple air samples throughout your home, and they call it a day. And they're not looking around, they're not doing the investigating. They're not, you know, going that step further. And the home really is a system, and I love that you talk about it. So, we'll probably get into this a little bit more about what an inspection looks like for you. But in your opinion, you know, is there some like, key, like...I don't want to say red flags, but things that people can look out for, maybe when they're calling an IEP and they're interviewing or vetting them over the phone, that kind of separate the so-so IEPs from those who maybe are a bit more knowledgeable and maybe more likely to give them a better outcome?

JS

John Skelly

6:15

Yeah, absolutely. So, you know, I think that, you know, one of the things that I know I do personally is I try to, you know, express a genuine interest in the customer or the potential client's issue, right? And, you know, I ask a lot of questions and, you know, try to help understand, you know, what's driving the call. Why are they calling today? You know, so that genuine interest is often something that someone should look out for, you know, if the person is trying to, you know, kind of just spend their time answering maybe some questions. And, you know, a red flag would be, you know, maybe a company who's immediately leading with testing. You know, asking, "How many rooms do you have? And we got to do an air test in each room." That's really more of a, you know, kind of what we call a mold testing company, because there's a real distinction between a mold inspection company and mold testing company. You know, mold inspection companies really spend the time, you know, to investigate the house and, you know, spend time understanding the building history, understanding, you know, occupant complaints, you know. So that's some of the things that, you know, people may be watching...should be looking out for when you're interviewing an IEP is just, you know, are they asking you questions? Are they showing you an interest in, maybe, what's going on in your house, you know? And because they're all really important factors at the end of the day, right? Because when we're doing an assessment, you're putting puzzle pieces together.

KS

Kendra Seymour

7:40

Yeah.

JS

John Skelly

7:41

And things are, you know, that they're all part of it, essentially, you know?

KS

Kendra Seymour

7:45

Yeah, I love that. And I love that clue, right? Like they should be asking, "Well, why are you calling? Like, what's the health, what's the history of the home?" You know, testing is only one piece of the puzzle. But I think, unfortunately, it's where a lot of people lead with, and they rely on that, and only that. And so, I know that, you know, I imagine when you go through homes of your clients, like, it's a multi-hour inspection. Like, are you getting up in the attic? Are you, like, poking around? Like, just quickly, because I'm sure that could be a whole episode. Like, what's your approach? Like, where do you start?

JS

John Skelly

8:19

Well, I always...I always say, when my clients ask if I'm going to the attic, I say "Yes, but under protest." You know? I don't...who likes to go into an attic? But, yeah, I mean, the average inspection will run, you know...a standard-size house, you know, 1500 to, you know, 2200 square feet or so, we'll average about three hours on site. You know, it goes...and that's before doing any testing or anything like that. You know, that's before doing any potentially invasive inspection. You know, that's just going through the house. We generally start top to bottom, I'm sorry, bottom to top, rather. We inspect the basement, crawl space, do a room-by-room inspection. You know, look at all the HVAC registers, floor vents, ceiling registers as we're going through the room, carefully inspect the ceilings, wall surfaces, infrared scan, moisture map, or leak detection survey of all surfaces. You know, toilet, showers, under sinks, anywhere there's a weak spot in the building envelope, right under the windows, chimneys, skylights, et cetera, open up the HVACs, disconnect ductwork, you know. So, it's...pull back insulation in the attic. You know, we can't see everything, of course, you know. But we try. We try to look for some red flags and, you know, areas that we might...and a lot of times, we're not necessarily finding mold. We're finding red flag areas or areas that, you know, we're going to put a sticker on and say, "Look, this is a potential hot spot."

KS

Kendra Seymour

9:46

Yeah, yeah. I mean, because it all starts with moisture. If you didn't have moisture, you're not going to have microbial growth. And so, it's looking for those things. I love it. You're like this detective, essentially, for the home, which I think is just so cool. Now, sometimes we get people saying that...well, you know, maybe they bought a new home, or they're under contract to buy a new home, and they think, "Well, I'm just going to hire a home inspector,"

which is great. They have their skill set, and they do certain things. What is the difference, though, between a home inspector and what you do? And when might someone want to hire both?

JS

John Skelly

10:23

Okay. So, it's a good question. Great question, actually, because, you know, I think, unfortunately, the mold inspection business, it's secondary. It's considered secondary. It's considered less important to a home inspection. Home inspectors are—and it's not knocking them at all—they're, you know, they're, they're generally lauded as all-knowing, right? You know, home inspectors are generalists, would be a good way to, you know...like a general practitioner. If you're hiring a good mold inspector, a good IEP, you know, environmental consultant, they're specialists, right? Or they're going to specialize in several fields. And I tell my client...all my potential clients this, is the lens that I look at a house through is very different than the lens of home inspector. And what they do is absolutely invaluable in the purchase of a new home. But unfortunately, mold inspections, like I said, they're often...there's so many factors, you know?

There's a kind of a philosophy that if the person doing the inspection is not qualified to evaluate mold, test mold, write a remediation plan about mold, or diagnose the underlying cause, if they don't find anything, then you don't need a mold inspection. And it's completely reversed, right? And, you know, what happens (especially in today's market), it's really tough for people, because they're spending, you know, thousands of dollars on inspections, and they start cutting, you know, corners. And they feel, genuinely feel, that the home inspector is, you know, going to find things. But it's a very, very different inspection. And, you know, we often do find a lot of things that home inspectors don't see.

KS

Kendra Seymour

12:02

Yeah. So, it's worth, I think, sometimes people doing both. Especially if you're still in a position to negotiate, because you can either negotiate money back or interventions that can save you, you know, time and money in the long run. Or maybe you uncover something, and you're like, "Listen, I can't deal with this." And, you know, you pass on the home, which is never what we want to see. But, I mean, sometimes that's the reality.

JS

John Skelly

12:26

Well, you want to be informed. You know, be informed. You want to have the right information going in and, you know, make an informed decision. If, you know, the seller is going to work with you, or, you know, or not, or if this is something...if you love the house, you know, you're willing to take it and, you know, eat the cost of the remediation, you know, if you really love it, you know, but...

KS

Kendra Seymour

12:49

Yeah, and I think, too, like, I think people are always on the search for, like, that perfect home. There is no perfect home, right? You know, most homes are, at some point in their life, are going to have a problem, and we have to be okay with that. And our job as homeowners is to catch problems as early as possible, prevent them if we can, and then just deal with them safely and correctly. Because I think, if you...if someone's gone through this, I think sometimes there's some very real PTSD and they're like, "I never want to have a mold problem. Like, I'm going to move into, you know, a new home or a different home, and I'm never gonna have to worry about it." And you know, like, our homes are made of tens of thousands of parts, and we have a responsibility. But that's probably a whole 'nother talk about things that we can do as homeowners and renters to kind of maintain and prevent some of that moisture. Maybe you'll come back and do that. But I did want people to know, like, you don't need to find a perfect home, and it starts with just being knowledgeable.

So, I guess my question then, kind of shifting a little bit along that track of...let's say you're in a home, right? And your IEP has gone through and they've found a number of problem areas. And let's be honest, most of them don't have, like, a big pot of cash, and we have to prioritize. And sometimes we have to do the best that we can with the circumstances. So, how do you help your clients maybe, if they have multiple problems, prioritize, like, well, this is...let's start here and first, and then as resources and time allow, you can dig into some of these other problem areas. Do you have any advice for your clients or a way you approach that?

JS

John Skelly

14:24

Yeah, absolutely. I was asked a couple years ago to put my business in one word, and I said, "Perspective," right? You know, we can try to, you know, put everything into perspective for our clients, right? Because obviously, there's so much information in, you know, the modern era, right? Whether it's news, whether it's, you know, mold groups, whether it's, you know, opinions, right, from different professionals, online, blogs, et cetera. There's so much information. So, what I often try to do, what I do is consolidate that information and try to, you know, funnel that down into a digestible, understandable consultation for my clients, right? So, they can really understand. Because, again, you know, not all...it's very important, I think, to put mold in its, you know, respective boxes, essentially, right? Because nothing should ever be dismissed, right? Because, you know, obviously the industry has evolved so much over the last few years. I mean, the...again, what you're doing with the group, the awareness, functional medicine doctors, right? People who have been undiagnosed for years, who are finding out that, you know, mold has been, you know, an underlier for so many ailments, right? So, the industry has shifted in a lot of ways. I know myself, as a consultant, I have evolved so much over the last several years, right? To never be dismissive of anything, right? Even if it is a very small amount of mold, right?

But at the same time, not all mold is bad. Not all mold is going to necessarily create serious problems inside the house or be a serious problem inside the house. Because I think if

we're making everything really, really bad, then things that are really bad...how do we, you know, differentiate? So, you know, I'll give you an example. I had a client yesterday. They bought the house five years ago; everyone's been symptomatic, right? Brain fog, migraines, chronic stuffiness. And I found a bunch of hidden mold in the basement, under the carpet, inside the walls. And then I also found, you know, three bathrooms that had tile and grout showers over green board, which is essentially paper-backed, moisture-resistant mold food, right? That they used for about 40 years in showers. And moisture gets behind eight out of ten showers I put my meter on. So, these are always something that I've always known this is a potential source of mold. But I take a lot more seriously than I did years ago, understanding that, you know, this could be a serious problem for someone who's sensitized. But I put that further down the list of priorities, because the basement was an area that they spent so much time in. It was their playroom. They hung out there, and that was where all the real, true exposure was happening. Not that the stuff behind the walls may not have but, you know, the basement was put in order top of priority. And then, you know, there's some moisture under some of the vinyl floors in one of the bathrooms and toilet seals were leaking. And all those areas where moisture is getting under tile floors, you can have moldy plywood underneath, you know, but that was put a little bit further down. Not to be ignored, and definitely on the remediation list, but maybe at a later date.

Because obviously, when you start talking just the remediation and then the reconstruction costs on top of that, you know, it's...I tell all my clients this: you know, there's often a knee-jerk reaction to, you know...I start pointing things out, and people will start throwing things out immediately, and I'm like, "Just wait. Let's just try to put everything in perspective for a minute." You know, you're going to sit down and once you get my report, you can have a conversation, you know, and you're going to think long and hard about how emotionally, financially invested you're going to get with this project. Because there's so many things to think about.

KS

Kendra Seymour

18:05

Yeah. And I think too, like, you get a report, I imagine, like that (but I've been that person), and you're so overwhelmed. Like, you don't even know where to start. And I think that's where a good IEP like yourself, or someone who's going to help you kind of understand that report and not just email it to you—be like, "Here you go. Have a nice life"—like, helps you prioritize where to go. Because I think otherwise, you kind of hit that panic button. I always say: "It's important to research before you react." Like, take a moment, take a deep breath, and like, figure out your next step. Don't worry 10 steps down the road. So, I imagine, like another priority or area...that makes sense if they're in the basement, but if it had been in a bedroom where you sleep or spend a lot of your time, like, you're thinking about things like that, for sure.

JS

John Skelly

18:52

Yeah. And it's often...you know, I field a lot of calls, you know, where, you know, potential clients have been, you know, interviewing other companies. And, you know, they get, or have an understanding that it's very important to understand the levels of mold in the

home. You know? And it's really...there's really no such thing, in a sense, you know, particularly when we're talking about air samples, because there's so many variables, you know? And you could get a very high air sample, or you could take a swab sample and there's mold on one beam in the basement, right? Or there's mold on 20.

KS

Kendra Seymour

19:25

Yeah.

JS

John Skelly

19:26

...people with symptoms. Or there's mold in the ventilation system, right? You know what I mean? So, there's so many factors that you have to look at when we're basing severity, you know? You know, the client asked me that yesterday, and we had...I think the mold was maybe two inches off the ground, but it was around the whole perimeter of the basement. And he's asked me, "How bad is this?" You know, my business, I've seen black mold eight feet up the walls, right? Obviously, that's being the worst, worst. But I said, "Your family's symptomatic."

KS

Kendra Seymour

19:54

Yeah.

JS

John Skelly

19:55

So, it doesn't really matter how little there is, right? Because we're looking at the big picture.

KS

Kendra Seymour

20:01

Yeah.

JS

John Skelly

20:02

Right? Um, so it's, it's trying to...important to try to put things into perspective for the client. You know?

KS

Kendra Seymour

20:09

That's so important, so important. I mean, okay, and you were talking about some of your clients. You, not long ago, posted a reel on your social media of one of the worst remediation jobs you had ever seen. Ever. I was wondering if you could talk about that? And it, you talked about...you, I believe you went back to the home because you were doing post-remediation verification, which is post testing. So maybe you can also give us a little lesson in that, for those who aren't familiar. But can you tell us about that job? Because it was mind-blowing, the videos.

JS

John Skelly

20:39

Yeah. So, that was, yeah, that was really bad. So, what that was, was this woman came home to...from a, you know, two-week vacation. She came home to steam damage, right? The hot water heater was leaking. And steam damage is pretty epic, when we talk about mold, because steam travels. It travels up through wall cavities. It travels through ceiling and plumbing chases, right? It finds, basically, a path of least resistance. And it starts condensing, and it starts colonizing very, very fast because of the water vapor and the temperature of the water, right? So, she'd had a, you know...don't wanna get into the back story too much, but she'd had a water damage restoration. And when we were called in, obviously, we wrote her remediation plan, which involved, you know, ripping up subfloor, you know, basically all but gutting the basement. You know, you had to do significant structural cleaning, right? Because the mold was just so visible, so amplified on the wood. And this company went in and literally just took an arrow sprayer and sprayed it...right over it. And they made zero effort, zero attempt to clean the wood. I mean, this is as bad as bad gets. I mean, this is not...the industry standard, unfortunately, is poor, right, when we talk about remediation. But most companies make an effort.

KS

Kendra Seymour

22:05

Right, right, right. This is the worst-case scenario, folks. So, like, there's a big spectrum here and...and I'm just highlighting this, though, because it does happen. Know that the remediation is possible, but this story, I think, has a lot of lessons to be learned, you know, for people.

JS

John Skelly

22:21

And the one...the one thing I'll say is that, you know, unfortunately, you know, the...some of it came down to lack of consumer awareness, right? You know, in the sense that, you know, I had to ask the homeowner. I said, "Look, did you, did you show them my report?" She said, "Well, I gave it to them." I'm like, "Did you go through it, line by line with, you know, what they were going to do versus..." You know, unfortunately, it was no. And you know, sometimes we're trusting the professionals, you know, to come into our house, but, you know, it really behooves the homeowner to be as informed and as involved in all aspects of the remediation as much as possible, right, to making sure that the job is being done properly.

KS

Kendra Seymour

22:59

Yeah. I mean, that's why I love, like...when you hire an IEP, part of that should be that, if warranted, if you need remediation, they're going to write a plan based on what is best and safest for you, not what is fastest or cheapest or easiest for the remediation company. And so again, it's like...people think, oh, it's one more cost. But I think it's so important to protecting your overall investment, to ensuring that maybe remediation gets done right the first time, that all of these things are in place. That to me, it's just such a helpful, helpful

piece for the puzzle. And we get that it's costly. So, when you went into this home, can you tell us a little bit about what you saw? That was just like, holy moly.

JS

John Skelly

23:43

That...oh, that same home you're talking about? Um, you know, actually, just real quick, like, what you're saying about that, that additional cost. I mean, what actually happened in this situation, now is another company had to come in. I'm actually going back to check this job on Friday. They had to grind all the paint off of the structural wood. So, in essence, I hope she got a refund. I'm not sure if she did, but in essence, it set her back, because it...the job now was...took more time, you know, to have to get all that paint off, to properly reclean and reseal the wood. So, it was a setback. What did I see? I mean, I just saw, you know, just dirt and debris and, you know, just big areas of mold just painted over, you know? No containment, no machines. I mean, it was just, you know, sheet rock crumbs everywhere. It was just absolutely horrible, absolutely horrible. Yeah.

KS

Kendra Seymour

24:41

I'm glad she has you, though, to help maybe kind of right this ship, and, you know, right the wrong. But, and as someone who has made the mistakes and hired the wrong company and had to go back and have areas redone, I've been there. So, if you make that mistake, like, give yourself some grace and move on. And head on over to our website, because we have some really good strategic information. I write all of our resources, you know, because I've been there; I know what it means to make those mistakes. So, hopefully, you can learn from John's client's mistake, from my mistakes, and make smarter choices than what we did. So, and not to get too broad here, but you kind of talked about the restoration industry. I've often said that it's like the Wild West, you know? What is one of the biggest issues, in your opinion, with the restoration industry following, like, a water event?

JS

John Skelly

25:39

Well, how many? So, one of the biggest issues I think I find is remediation/restoration companies are often too worried about direction of payment, right? Who's paying us, right? So, when there's a flood, there's water damage in the basement, and they'll go in, and they'll immediately set up drying equipment, and they'll start maybe cutting out walls. But then, the insurance company says, "Well, we want you to dry the floors," but we really know those floors need to come up. And instead of relaying the information to the homeowner, the insured, saying, "Look, doesn't matter what the insurance company is saying. It's going to cost extra X, Y, and Z. We really need to remove these floors. Let's just do it. Sign here," right? Oftentimes, the restoration companies will just...don't say anything to the homeowner. They do what the insurance company asks them. They pull their machines, they get paid, they walk away, move on to the next one.

Now, I'm not trying to paint the restoration industry with a bad brush, right? But unfortunately, I've been in this industry for a long time, and I do see, you know, worst case, you know, scenarios and lack of communication, you know. Like I was saying to the

homeowner, "Look, we gotta cut these walls. I know the insurance company wants to dry them. But if we don't, you're going to get mold," right? And they allow that time to go. They don't communicate to the insured. And the insured often thinks that...we have a sense of entitlement as consumers, right? That we, that the insurance...because we pay the insurance company lots and lots of money, which we do, that they are going to take care of everything, you know? And often, the insurance companies, more and more nowadays, are pushing back. Homeowners rely too much on the professionals, again, as we should, right? You know, whether it's in, you know...when I bought my house, I trusted my realtors, I trusted the lawyers. There was some things that didn't go very well, you know...we trust the professionals. But I think it behooves the homeowner, again, to just be as involved in the process as much as possible. You know, I see homeowners...because, again, they...the insurance company is going to delay payment. They kick the company off the job, you know? And my colleagues will have them sign a hold harmless when they go back two weeks later...

KS

Kendra Seymour

28:05

Yeah.

JS

John Skelly

28:06

...because the homeowner didn't want them. Well, the insurance company's not paying you. I'm not paying you.

KS

Kendra Seymour

28:11

Yeah.

JS

John Skelly

28:12

So, you need to leave until we get approval from the insurance company. By then, there's already a mold problem.

KS

Kendra Seymour

28:17

Yeah. Yeah. It's much easier to fix a water problem quickly, right away, and prevent that bigger mold problem. But so often there's that delay. And I'm glad you brought up insurance, because for anyone listening (and I don't know if it'll be out by the time this one drops), I have an interview with a public adjuster that was gonna blow people's mind on insurance, and how to navigate that. So, you might want to check that out when it's out, because it's a super stressful part of that whole equation. I get it; like, the money is not some endless, you know, ATM for most of us and so...but part of this means you have to, you know, spend a little to, I think, protect your bigger investment, and, you know, not pay for it down the road.

So then, let's talk about a little bit about, like, a water damage. You know, what are some of the mistakes that you see people making when they first...maybe they stumble upon...they, like, go down to their basement, they haven't been down there in a while, and they realize that the water heater is leaking? Or, all of a sudden, you know, water is coming in the back door. What are some of the mistakes—the things we shouldn't do—when we first find or suspect, you know, mold or water damage?

JS

John Skelly

29:27

Okay. So, I think when people first, you know, discover water damage...I mean, let's say it's a, you know, it's a mechanical failure, it's a hot water heater break, or something like that. I mean, most homeowners, you know, do respond. They call their insurance companies. Insurance companies send out, you know, a restoration company. In a perfect world, everything is taken care of, right? Situations where, you know, maybe there's mold at this point, and you know...well, let me backtrack for a second. A lot of times...let's say there's a flood in people's basements, right? They don't have flood insurance, right? It's outside water. It's not a mechanical failure. So, they got an inch of water. They got a half-inch of water. They soak up the water, they put in some fans, they spray some bleach, and that's it. When water hits the floor, most sheetrock is installed touching or almost touching the slab, right? So, it wicks the water up immediately, right? Maybe they dried out the carpet enough. Sometimes they ripped up the carpet, but the walls will often get moldy. A lot of that is, unfortunately, it's, you know, they made best efforts as far as they were concerned. But there was this lack of, you know, an understanding, you know? So, that's one of the issues I see when homeowners do have a mold problem. And I have a lot of examples, unfortunately.

And I have one from just last week, where a woman, whose basement had flooded multiple occasions, had a son who was symptomatic, lived in the lower level of the house, and had hired a mold remediation company to come in and remove mold in the areas that she thought she had mold, right? That's the main, one of the main differences, right? You know, you hire a remediation company to come in, and 45 states in the country, there's no IEP, no independent parties required. So, the remediation company asks Kendra, "Where's the mold?" You say, "It's over here." "Here's a price to remove it." That's it. In this case, she had mold in multiple other parts of the lower level of her house. She had mold under her furniture, and these are only things that are going to be identified during a detailed inspection. So, one of the mistakes, again, is not...and a lot of people don't understand. They don't realize that they need to hire somebody, and this company that actually did the work in their house did it illegally under New York State law. They were a company that came from out of state, and, you know, just...you know, they diagnosed their own problem and gave her a price to do the work. And obviously, she was still left with a ton of mold in the house and out, you know, X amount of dollars.

KS

Kendra Seymour

32:06

Yeah, I'll jump in there. Because I think sometimes, too, people think, "I'm going to call the mold company and they're going to come over and they're going to..." for free. And they

think, oh, that's an inspection. No, that is an estimate. That is a...that's a sales pitch. That is not an inspection. That is not what John does. That's not what we were talking about. Because, you know, if...oftentimes, you as the homeowner would be like, "I know that's a problem. That toilet is leaking, and I see the stain below." But what we're saying is you're bringing in someone else to kind of do that more thorough investigation of the whole thing, figure out how far, the extent, are there other underlying causes, are there other issues? And so, that is so important. And please, for the love (and you said it briefly), like, don't be spraying bleach on, like...stop your spouse or whoever. Just...you're better off not disturbing it. Would you agree with that, John, until you can bring in a professional?

JS

John Skelly

33:01

100%. 100%. I mean, unfortunately, you know, a lot of people have the "out of sight, out of mind" concept, or the "mold schmold" attitude, I call it, you know. Where we don't see it; it's not, you know, it's not affecting us. And obviously, we very much know that that's, you know, not true, that obviously, the residual spores, mycotoxins, et cetera are, you know, affecting people in a lot of different ways, you know? So, but a lot of it, you know, I'm calling out the homeowners, you know? You really need to pay attention to your house. You really need to be aware, you know? And far too many homeowners are not aware. They don't stay on top of things. They don't run dehumidifiers. They're, you know, they're just not aware of their house. And there's a lot of things to understand. There's a lot of moving parts in the house. And again, sometimes it's reliance on the professionals. And, you know, my AC, I have it serviced every year.

KS

Kendra Seymour

33:57

Yeah.

JS

John Skelly

33:58

So, my clients have the HVAC guy just snap a picture, right? We have iPhones now, real easy. Have them show you the interior components. But countless clients with chronic sinus problems, and I go and I open up their air handler and it's full of mold, or duct works full of mold, and they had it serviced every year. So, there's that over-reliance sometimes on professionals, that...the assumption that they're going to notify us or do the right thing, or even have the knowledge to know what they're looking at sometimes.

KS

Kendra Seymour

34:24

Well, I love that you mentioned that because we just had an interview with AJ Callegan. He's an HVAC technician, and it's part 9 of our Mold Remediation Mini Class Series for anyone who wants to take a deeper dive into their HVAC system. And he has been in the industry for, like, two decades, and he says this all the time. He's like, "Ask me how many units I've opened that don't have some level of microbial growth," and he's like, "100% unless it's a brand-new unit or a nearly new unit." Now, he's down in the south. But the point is, like, we have to be paying attention to these areas. And I love that tip: Snap a pic.

Like, I actually do that with my HVAC people, if I'm not also down there, because I also like to look for myself and...but I get it. If it's up in an attic or one of those places, you may not be crawling up there after, but that's such a helpful tip. I know we're running low on time, so I want to kind of pivot to our last question. You know, you and I have talked before about remediation, and you know, it can kind of look a little different for everyone, and that's because each situation is unique. But there are some things that are the same for everyone, and there's some things that are different. Can you just kind of give us, kind of your takeaways there on that?

JS

John Skelly

35:27

Um, sorry, what was the question again?

KS

Kendra Seymour

35:29

So, we've talked about, you know, remediation might look a little different depending on each of our situations. It's not necessarily a cookie cutter-type thing, and I think it's because your...each person's house is so, you know, unique and their situation is different. So, can you help us understand that, when you've said that before, that remediation looks a little different for everyone?

JS

John Skelly

35:50

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So, I kind of, you know, just jump back to one of the things about, you know, one of the good things to look for in a good IEP is, you know, a good IEP should be able to understand the needs of the client, right? Because clients are very different. You know, you have clients who have no symptoms, you have clients who have allergy symptoms, asthmatic symptoms, then you have clients who have the inflammatory issues, right? So, I always say that, you know, during a remediation, we have to move the needle a little bit further, you know, in one direction, but, you know, depending on the needs of the client, right? So, the one thing I do is I write the remediation plan the same. The report is the same in the sense, but everything is there, all the information is there for the client if they need it, right? 'Cause yeah, we talked a little bit before about, you know, there's certain things, you know, obviously there's the dollar factor, right? You know, affordability, whether or not someone can actually afford to do everything as part of the, you know, remediation.

But that's why I think it's, again, very important not to be dismissive of even small areas of mold, to make sure that everything is included in the work plan, even if it is a small, small area. You know, you prioritize, put things in order of severity, at least, so the client can, you know, try to understand, you know, what is...what the priority should be, as far as the remediation and what things should be, you know, maybe worked on at a later date or, you know, maybe don't need professional remediation. I know we don't like to encourage, you know, DIY remediations, but there are situations. Again, it depends on the client. You know? It really, really does depend on the client. And you can often feel the needs of the client, you know? Sometimes people are very dismissive of mold, and they just, they're

going to do it the way they're going to do it regardless, you know? And you just try to advise them as best as you can. And then, you know, there's the clients who really do lean on the expertise to, you know, to guide them as best you can.

KS

Kendra Seymour

37:50

Yeah, and I think the big takeaway here is...and I think anyone probably listening to our podcast or following along our resources, is someone who is, you know, committed to maybe learning more, or at least curious. And that really is, like, the first and most important step. And I think...I say that to be empowering to people. Like, if you're listening to this podcast, you're already on your way to making smarter and better choices and to understanding your home and your system a little bit more. And that's so important. John, this has been super great. If people had follow-up questions or wanted to get into contact with you, how could they find you?

JS

John Skelly

38:23

Oh, yeah, absolutely. So, my website is hnstmoldinspections.com. HNST is an acronym for Honest, so remove the vowels. H-N-S-T mold inspections dot com. There's a contact form. You can look me up on Google. Phone numbers are there. I'm on Facebook. Yeah.

KS

Kendra Seymour

38:40

Yeah. Awesome. And we'll link to that in the show notes. John also happens to be one of our amazing sponsors too, so he can be found under our Corporate Partners tab. So, John, thank you for being that and supporting us and everything. It's been truly wonderful.

JS

John Skelly

38:52

Yeah, it's been...I'm so happy to be...just be part of what you're doing. It really, really means a lot.

KS

Kendra Seymour

38:57

Yeah, I love it. I love it. More and more people talking about it and doing good work. It's going to make, you know, our indoor spaces healthier for more people. And for everyone listening, do me a favor. If you found this helpful, head on over to ChangeTheAirFoundation.org and sign up for our newsletter, because it really is the best way to get great information like this directly to your inbox. We'll see you next time. Thanks so much.

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