



KATRINA & RITA CLEANUP WORKERS

MOLD FACTSHEET

Rain, leaks, and floods from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita damaged many Gulf Coast homes, schools, and businesses. In many buildings that had water damage, sheetrock, carpets, and other building materials and furnishings became contaminated with mold.

Many damaged buildings that contain mold are now being cleaned up. Some workers have been hired specifically to remove mold. Other workers are removing damaged building materials and furnishings or doing cleaning and renovation. All of these workers may be exposed to mold in the course of their work.

Workers handling mold-contaminated materials or working around mold-contaminated materials or in mold-contaminated areas may become temporarily or permanently ill unless they use the right personal protective equipment, including the proper respirator.

WHAT IS MOLD?

Molds are tiny organisms that are a natural part of the environment. Molds are almost always present both outdoors and indoors. They are usually not harmful. However, some people get sick when indoor amounts of molds become much higher than outdoor amounts, or when certain types of mold that are not usually present indoors start to grow indoors. Molds multiply indoors when they have a source of moisture (leaks, floods, high humidity) and a source of food (anything organic, including wood, dirt, carpeting, or sheetrock).

WHAT HEALTH PROBLEMS ARE CAUSED BY EXPOSURE TO MOLD?

Breathing in or touching mold can cause health problems. Because exposure to either living or dead mold can cause health problems, killing mold (for example, with bleach) does not get rid of all the health hazards. Symptoms or illness caused by exposure to mold may occur or get worse at work and get better away from work.

Health problems caused by exposure to mold include:

- *Irritation.* Molds can cause burning eyes, congestion, cough, and postnasal drip.
- *Allergy.* Some people become allergic to molds and may develop asthma, causing itchy, watery eyes, congestion, cough, wheezing, tightness in the chest, and difficulty breathing.
- *Poisoning and Infectious Disease.* Some molds create chemicals that may cause serious illness. A small number of certain types of molds can cause serious infections. (However, poisoning or infectious disease caused by mold is rare. People with compromised immune systems are most at risk.)

HOW CAN WORKERS TELL IF HARMFUL MOLD IS PRESENT?

Workers usually cannot tell for sure whether harmful mold is present or not. Molds are too small to see without a microscope, although molds can sometimes be seen or smelled.

HURRICANE KATRINA AND RITA CLEANUP WORKERS SHOULD ASSUME THAT WATER-DAMAGED BUILDINGS, MATERIALS, OR FURNISHINGS ARE CONTAMINATED WITH MOLD. USE PROPER PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND SAFE WORK PRACTICES!

WORKER PROTECTION AND SAFE WORK PRACTICES

The main way that mold gets into people's bodies and affects their health is by breathing it in (inhalation). *Gulf Coast cleanup workers should always wear a respirator when working around mold.*

Workers should:

- ✓ use the right respirator and filters and make sure the respirator is "NIOSH approved"
- ✓ be *fit-tested* for the right model and size by a professional
- ✓ know how to put the respirator on and perform *seal checks* each time it is worn
- ✓ change filters or use a new disposable N95 respirator at the beginning of each work day (or more often if necessary).



**Disposable
Air Purifying
Respirator**



**Half Face
Air Purifying
Respirator**



**Full Face
Air Purifying
Respirator**

•Dust masks and surgical masks are not respirators. They do not protect against mold.

•All employers, including contractors, must comply with the OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard (29 CFR 1910.134).

•OSHA law protects all workers, including undocumented workers.

For small cleanup/rip-out jobs (example: up to 3 sheets of sheetrock), use:

- an N95 disposable respirator (a reusable half face respirator with N95 filters is better), and
- non-latex, vinyl, nitrile, or rubber gloves, and
- tight-fitting goggles designed to keep out dust (no holes or vents).

A small mold cleanup job is:

- 10 square feet or less of heating, ventilation, or air conditioning equipment, ducts, or insulation,
- or 100 square feet or less of building materials such as ceiling tiles or sheetrock.

For large cleanup/rip-out jobs (example: more than 3 sheets of sheetrock), use:

- full-face respirator with N, R, or P100 filters (or powered air purifying respirator [PAPR] with HEPA filter), and
- disposable protective clothing that covers the entire body, including head and shoes, and
- non-latex, vinyl, nitrile, or rubber gloves.

A large mold cleanup job is:

- more than 10 square feet of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning equipment, ducts, pipes, and insulation, or
- more than 100 square feet of building materials such as ceiling tiles or sheetrock, or
- any size area, indoors or outdoors, where a lot of dust is generated during work operations, or
- any place where there is a lot of visible mold.

For any area with known or suspected mold contamination:

- Wet down mold-contaminated surfaces to prevent mold dust from getting into the air.
- Use HEPA vacuum cleaners only - no dry sweeping or non-HEPA vacuums.
- Bag, secure, and discard disposable personal protective equipment after it is used.
- Clean reusable personal protective equipment before reusing.
- Wash hands and face with soap and clean water before eating or smoking.
- Shower with soap and clean water before driving or returning home.
- Be aware that you may also be exposed to harmful chemicals like asbestos and lead that may require additional protection.