



How to Handle & Prevent Mold Related OSHA Complaints in your Workplace

An Advanced Mold Diagnostics Ebook

Work environments are like second homes in the sense that many people spend a significant percentage of their waking hours at their job. When employees spend so much of their time investing in their companies, they expect their companies to provide them with a safe, clean work environment. And the U.S. government expects the same. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), established in 1971, has helped American businesses significantly improve in this area over the past 40+ years.

And that's probably exactly why you're here reading this ebook. We hear it time and time again. The situation goes something like this:

An employee at your company notices visible mold or feels threatened by what they believe to be poor indoor air quality. They want the situation remedied, but don't want to address you - the employer - directly. So, they make an anonymous call to OSHA. Your building manager gets notified that the situation must be remedied or legal measures will be taken.



Now you're here, looking for answers and a solution to this problem. You want to take care of it quickly and effectively before it gets out of hand and we don't blame you. If employee safety is at stake, then you must act...not to mention, the structural integrity of your building could be compromised from water damage if the issue is left unresolved.

So, don't worry. You're not alone. **In fact, not a week goes by that we don't have an employer calling us about an anonymous complaint to OSHA.**

Common Complaints

By far, the most common OSHA-related issue we hear about is unaddressed mold growth. In addition to cases of visible and suspected microbial growth, we also get called for situations pertaining to indoor air quality, which can be related or unrelated to mold. Unidentified odor complaints are also common complaints and are usually a VOC related issue.

In decades past, air quality was not considered in an assessment of the physical state of a commercial environment. But now, compliance measures are in place to prioritize even this invisible aspect of the workplace environment. Air quality can be compromised due to anything from microbial growth, to the spread of viruses and bacteria in an office environment, to the harmful release of MVOC's (microbial volatile organic compounds) released by mold spores.

OSHA rules now justify the use of respirators to prevent the inhalation of harmful airborne contaminants that are alive or were released from a living organism. But it is ultimately the employers responsibility to create the safest work environment possible.

Your Compliance Responsibility:

Address the Issue Now, Prevent the Problem Later

1. Moisture Control: The key to mold prevention is controlling the moisture at it's source. As you are considering how to address your current mold issue and prevent future growth, remember that there are five things that must be present for mold to exist and grow:

- Mold spores would be the first necessary ingredient. Mold is part of the ecosystem and is found everywhere outside as well as inside.
- The right temperature is the second ingredient. In fact, what we would refer to as "room temperature" is just about right for most types of mold, although they can colonize within a range of temperatures above or below room temperature. Certain species grow well indoors.
- The right amount of oxygen is also required. Without access to oxygen, mold cannot survive and grow.

- A nutrient or “food” source is a must-have. Most buildings are built out of what is essentially dead organic materials (think wood, drywall, ceiling tiles, carpet). Since mold exists in the natural environment for the purpose of decomposing dead organic materials, it’s no wonder that when we build using dead organic materials that it finds its way into our homes and offices.
- Moisture is also required. Without a moisture source, mold will not grow. Luckily, this is an area where we have some control.



So, back to our main point for this section: If moisture within the mold problem equation is the only thing we have control over, then controlling the source/s of moisture in your commercial building is imperative

- Fix plumbing leaks (bulk water)
- Fix/address ground water intrusions (bulk water)
- Monitor and control relative humidity (water vapor)

2. Regular Checks of the HVAC System, Ductwork, Etc.

A preventive maintenance plan should be put into place to avoid the potential growth of mold in these major systems of a commercial building. Here are some of our top recommendations:

- Schedule semi-annual maintenance of air handlers (HVAC).
- Pay particular attention to any building components that are exposed to water (e.g., drainage pans, coils, cooling towers, and humidifiers) as these require detailed maintenance.
- Change filters every three months.
Conduct a thorough cleaning of all ductwork every five years.
- Remember that all components of the system must be cleaned. Failure to clean one component of a contaminated system can result in re-contamination of the entire system.

3. Use Safe Renovation Practices: If and when your commercial property undergoes any sort of renovation, it is imperative that deliberate measures be taken to preserve air quality and ensure safety. Here are some examples:

- Working on the HVAC system or installing a new one? Be sure to keep pressurization in mind when making changes. Systems and buildings can be positively or negatively pressurized and reversing or modifying the pressure can have a huge impact on air quality.
- For new building work, consider erecting dust barriers made of polyethylene sheeting to isolate the work areas from areas occupied by employees.
- Supply and return ducts should be covered in the area near the renovation to prevent the spread of odors and construction related dust.
- When undertaking renovations that break the integrity of the building envelope, such as roofing work, regular checks should be made for water intrusions at the break sites.
- During renovation, make it a practice to always clean up standing water immediately.



Your Compliance Responsibility:

In order to truly take care of mold growth in a commercial building, you must identify and completely correct the source of the water or moisture problem. Mold removal should be complete - meaning visible mold, mold-damaged materials, and moldy odors should no longer be present. In addition, sampling, should show that the level and types of mold and mold spores inside the building are similar to those found outside, indicating that the mold growth has been eliminated.

Osha recommends, ***“Sampling for mold should be conducted by professionals with specific experience in designing mold-sampling protocols, sampling methods for microbial contaminants, and interpretation of results.”***

Don't Wait Any Longer...Here's Why:

A small problem left untreated will not disappear, but will only fester and get worse with time. Usually the visible mold that is discovered is only a small part of the real, underlying problem - very much like the tip of the iceberg. There may be hidden mold inside of walls and ceilings and waiting too long to have the issue addressed could result in the following costs of procrastination:

- Your employees will have to continue working in an unsafe environment, where their health could be compromised.
- Your company's health care costs could significantly increase if employees experience any complications due to mold or poor indoor air quality.
- You'll eventually have to pour more money into replacing structural components of your building due to water damage (remember that mold is an indicator of excess water or water vapor).

When you spot mold, take the opportunity to identify the root issue and have it remedied. Ignoring the mold could mean ignoring a leaking pipe, a flooding basement or unchecked relative humidity...and in the end, **more water damage = more money out of your pocket.**

When you address mold problems quickly, you save yourself in the long run.

- **Reduce the likelihood of having to take on costly renovations down the road due to damaged property.**
- **Reduce the likelihood that building occupants will suffer with health problems due to hidden mold growth left unaddressed.**
- **Prevent future OSHA complaints by taking care of the root of the issue NOW.**

Before You Go...

Our last piece of advice is to choose your mold remediation company wisely. Here is some food for thought:

Here at Advanced Mold Diagnostics, 50% of our business is made up of jobs where we are sent in to clean up the failed work of a previous remediation.

Don't be a statistic. Your building can benefit from quick, thorough service the first time. It's all about working with the right company.

Call Advanced Mold Diagnostics Today!

For over 20 years in this industry, we've been helping commercial clients like you respond to mold and indoor air quality complaints. As a comprehensive service provider, we offer:

- **Investigative services**
- **Consulting**
- **Cladding System Failure Investigations**
- **Remediation Services**
- **Expert Witness Testimony**



We work on projects involving building performance and the comfort, health and well being of building occupants. The scope of our services focus on matters concerning:

- **Mold inspection & detection**
- **Asbestos abatement**
- **Mold testing**
- **Mold remediation**
- **Indoor air quality investigations**
- **Construction defects**
- **Water damage & structural drying**
- **Odor investigations**

The aim of our practice is to protect people and property with proven, practical solutions and the best available science. If you're facing an anonymous OSHA compliant, Advanced Mold Diagnostics has all of the services necessary to address the issue effectively, quickly and up to legal standards.

Advanced Mold Diagnostics, Inc.

610-298-1540

info@advancedmoldiagnostics.com

1005 Sussex Blvd, Unit 6
Broomall, PA 19008