



September is Mold Awareness Month

Are you 'in the know' about mold? Your customers may ask questions... be sure to have the answers.

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Carpet cleaning professionals are often called in to help prevent mold from developing after a facility has suffered flood damage.

However, the actual act of cleaning carpet can also trigger mold growth.

Should mold develop, it can threaten the health of the customer, damage the contractor's reputation, and be very costly to remedy. It is estimated that mold damage costs insurers more than \$2.5 billion annually.

Because of the problems that can result and because September is Mold Awareness Month, carpet cleaning technicians owe it to themselves and their customers to stay informed about mold and what steps they can take to prevent it.

What is mold?

Mold is a microorganism found practically everywhere. In nature, it helps in the decomposition of debris, but it may also be found in cheese, beer, and medicines such as penicillin.

It can also develop indoors. The most hospitable indoor environment for mold usually includes an organic material, which serves as food, and moisture. Mold thrives in such areas and can form colonies in as short as 24 hours in and under carpets, wallpaper, even a stack of books.

How carpet cleaning can cause mold growth

According to the Institute of Inspection and Cleaning Restoration Certification (IICRC), most carpet manufactured today are made of plastic face yarns, not organic materials. Because of this, mold typically cannot grow on the carpet itself.

However, moisture along with organic materials introduced into the carpet by spills or on shoes can provide the hospitable environment discussed earlier. If the carpet is kept clean and dry, and dries relatively quickly after cleaning, the likelihood of mold growth is low.

However, if organic materials remain in the carpet after cleaning and the cleaned carpet take longer than 24 hours to dry, the possibility of mold growth increases significantly. This is why IICRC recommends that carpet

should be dry in six to eight hours or less.

How to prevent mold growth after cleaning

There are a number of steps carpet cleaning technicians can take to prevent mold growth after extraction carpet cleaning. These include the following:

- * Inspect your equipment. Older extractors may use considerably more water — one to two gallons of water per minute — than newer machines. Select low-moisture systems that use one gallon of water or less.
- * Avoid overwetting the carpet; dry stroke twice after each cleaning stroke.
- * Turn up HVAC systems as soon as carpet cleaning begins and keep them at elevated levels for two to four hours after cleaning.
- * In excessively humid areas, use air movers or add dehumidifiers to speed drying times.
- * “Groom” the carpet with a pile brush after cleaning. This helps separate carpet fibers, allowing for greater air circulation.

Finally, make your customers aware that steps must be taken to avoid mold growth after cleaning. Encourage them not to walk on the carpet. This can soil the carpet and it is these organic soils that soon become welcome signs for mold colonies.

Mickey McKee is the vice president of sales and marketing for U.S. Products and HydraMaster, manufacturers of professional carpet cleaning equipment.