



Winston-Salem Regional Association of REALTORS®, Inc.  
**From The Home Inspector:**

### **Fungal Growth Is Not Always Mold**

Mold is a subset of the fungus kingdom. It is estimated that there are 1.5 million to 5 million species of fungi and over 100,000 different types of mold, but only about 5% of fungi have been formally classified. They range from microscopic cells to large mushrooms we see regularly growing on the forest floor and come in a kaleidoscope of colors. Most fungi are not noticeable due to their size and locations where they grow or develop. Some will become visible when "fruiting" either visually or by smell. Fungal growth can develop on building materials if proper conditions are present. Several factors are involved, such as the presence of a food source (cellulose), moisture and optimal air temperature. Most healthy people tolerate moderate exposure to mold. However, each individual's exposure threshold is different. Some molds can cause allergic reactions or respiratory problems to individuals, especially in those who have a compromised immune or respiratory systems. Determining one's resistance should be discussed with a health professional.

Molds can enter homes by a variety of pathways. Most often they are introduced by people, pets or even plant matter we bring into our home. If the presence of mold is suspected in a home a qualified air quality contractor should be consulted for an evaluation (mold testing). Should it be determined that there is mold, remediation should be performed by a professional air quality contractor. Wiping the affected areas with bleach towels is not sufficient. It should be understood that the conditions that promoted the mold growth needs to be corrected as part of the clean-up. Even if the clean-up is successful the mold is likely to return if an environment that promotes fungal growth still exists.

So it's safe to say that we should not knowingly expose ourselves to large amounts of mold. Any home left vacant for an extended period is likely to have some evidence of elevated moisture (due to a lack of sufficient ventilation or de-humidification normally provided by functioning air conditioning systems), which in turn could result in fungal growth. With a large number of distressed and/or vacant properties in today's real estate market there are a significant number of homes that likely need evaluating. Hiring a professional licensed home inspector is highly recommended in any home purchase, especially in the case of those that have been vacant or unoccupied for an extended period of time.

Mold and fungal growth in homes has been a topic of discussion for some time and home inspectors have been included as part of the community of professionals with some basic knowledge of the subject. Licensed North Carolina home inspectors are not required to report on the "presence or absence of any suspected adverse environmental

conditions or hazardous substance, including but not limited to toxins, carcinogens, noise, and contaminants in the building or in soil, water and air". The North Carolina Home Inspector Licensure Board provided an official interpretation of the North Carolina General Statutes that states home inspectors "are not required to report on the presence of mold or mildew" in a letter dated November 2003 and is available at the following link:

[http://www.ncdoi.com/OSFM/Engineering\\_and\\_Codes/Documents/HILT\\_Documents/Interpretations/MoldAndMildewReporting.pdf](http://www.ncdoi.com/OSFM/Engineering_and_Codes/Documents/HILT_Documents/Interpretations/MoldAndMildewReporting.pdf)

However it is the opinion of the Licensure Board that home inspectors "shall report on signs of abnormal or harmful water penetration into the building or signs of abnormal or harmful condensation on building components."

So what this translates to is that if there is evidence that the home shows evidence of water intrusion or harmful condensation on building components is that a home inspector shall report it. Should there be visible evidence of fungal growth the reporting and identification of such should be deferred to an environmental or indoor air quality professional.

Andy Hilton  
Hilton Home Inspection, Inc.  
Andy@PIATriad.com