

Mold is the name given to a group of fungi that are commonly found on wet or damp building surfaces. These molds are found in the soil and adapt successfully to grow on a wide variety of construction materials and fabrics.

HOW DOES MOLD GET INTO A BUILDING?

Mold and fungal spores are everywhere. They occur naturally outdoors, need moisture to grow, and gravitate to areas where there is water damage, elevated and prolonged humidity, or dampness. Common sources of excessive indoor moisture that can lead to mold problems include:

- Roof leaks from damaged roofing materials, standing water due to poor drainage, or blocked gutters
- Storm-driven rain through window frames, exterior walls, or door assemblies
- Leaking or broken water pipes, sewer back-ups, or overflows
- Damp basements due to poorly managed rainwater drainage or inadequate air circulation
- Condensation on cold surfaces
- Poor drainage of condensate that collects in HVAC drain pans

NOTE: In the past, plastic tubing connections to water-cooled equipment in university labs or shops would regularly pop off during non-peak hours due to rising water pressure. To improve the process, closed-loop cooling baths have replaced the direct connections to water lines preventing flooding and water damage to labs, offices, equipment, and furniture.

HOW CAN MOLD BE PREVENTED?

The key to preventing and stopping indoor mold amplification is to control excessive moisture and condensation. It is important to keep the susceptible areas in the building clean and dry.

In general, mold will not grow indoors without water, dampness, or excessive moisture. Report all plumbing leaks and moisture problems to FPM at (213) 740-6833. If mold is discovered, contact injuryprevention@usc.edu to report it.

WHAT I NEED TO DO

- Maintain indoor relative humidity levels below 60%, ideally between 30 and 50% (US EPA).
- Ensure the ground slopes downward and away from the building foundation.
- Check landscape irrigation to ensure the water spray pattern is not contacting the exterior walls.
- Keep air conditioner drip pans and drain lines clean, flowing properly, and unobstructed.
- Ensure cold storage door latches and gaskets are in good condition.
- In case of floods or leaking pipes, remove any standing water promptly.
- Dry out and clean water-damaged materials, or if heavily damaged, remove and replace.
- Discard materials that are wet for more than 48 hours since they are likely to produce mold growth.
- Report extensive water damage to your supervisor. Supervisors are advised to contact their building managers or FPM.



REFERENCES

AIHA - [Mold Resource Center](#)

US EPA - [Mold Course](#)

US EPA - [A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home](#)

EH&S - [Mold Prevention in Cold Rooms Fact Sheet](#)

