MOLD IN OUR SCHOOLS

Seminar Follow-Up

July 31, 2013

A Call to Action

The summer 2013 Mold Invasion has begun. In fact, outside of our JIFs schools have already reported major mold issues.

Proven by five of our members last year, and many districts around the state, mold can shut down schools and cause millions of dollars in damages.

As we learned at our Mold in Our Schools seminar, all districts can be susceptible to an invasion of mold if they don't take appropriate actions. You must act now.

Extraordinary Events Require Extraordinary Actions

Why are we experiencing severe mold intrusion? The number one reason is humidity. We are experiencing unprecedented weather conditions. Record rain falls, followed by oppressive heat, leading to high humidity.

These extraordinary events require every district to change the way they maintain their schools. It can no longer be "this is the way we have always cleaned and maintained our schools".

"One Size Does Not Fit All"

Again, we learned preventing mold in schools requires each district to assess the unique circumstances and characteristics of their schools. An evaluation of your HVAC system is essential. The type of system (unit ventilators, rooftop units, heat only units), the age, the condition, the controls are all factors that are unique to your district.

Therefore, the answer to "how should I run any HVAC systems?" can be different for each district. You need to ask yourself, are your systems operating in a way that adequately conditions the air to control humidity? Are they set properly for weekends and other times schools are closed? Answering these questions will help you specifically address issues in your district.

What Should I Do Immediately?

We know that humidity levels above 60% create an environment for mold growth. You should be monitoring humidity levels in your schools.

How? We gave each member who attended the seminar a hand held temperature/humidity gauge. Get one for the head custodians in each of your buildings. With this tool, have them take spot readings throughout the day in different parts of their building. Have the readings recorded on a simple form and sent to you each day. When a reading exceeds 60% you know some action is required.

Review your summer cleaning procedures. Again, we learned cleaning carpets and stripping and waxing floors the way we did ten years ago is not acceptable today. These habits can increase the potential for mold growth.

Meet with your buildings and grounds staff and your principals to review this document and John Geitz's Safety Bulletin Mold Safety & Prevention (see attached).

I have High Humidity Conditions – What Do I Do?

Lower the humidity. Can your HVAC system be adjusted to remedy the condition? If not, use dehumidifiers to dry out the humid areas. Commercial dehumidifiers can be purchased for approximately $800, a great way to use your safety incentive grant money.

I Believe Mold Growth Has Begun

Mold growth can begin almost anywhere. A common area is the underside of desks and table tops.

Initial mold growth is not visual to the eye without the use of a high powered flashlight. Make sure your head custodians each have flashlights.

If you discover a small amount (< 10 SF), clean the area using proper techniques.

Not sure of the extent of the problem? Call PIER, our Pollution Incident and Environmental Response Program, AIG (Chartis), for free consulting services (see attachment).

When Should I Report a Claim?

It never hurts to report a claim. There is no negative impact on you or your district. There can be a negative outcome to not reporting a claim in a timely fashion. So when in doubt, report it.

Reporting Mold Claims

Mold and other pollution related claims are to be reported as soon as practical upon awareness of a pollution condition.

These claims must be reported directly to AIG (Chartis) on the attached notice of loss/notice of claim form.

In Conclusion

Of course high humidity is just one cause of mold. Any place where water or moisture enters your building can lead to mold. Therefore, water events like storm flooding, pipe bursts, roof leaks, and condensation on pipes must all be corrected immediately. Inspections of your roof's storm grates and culverts to ensure roof integrity and a debris-free evaluation system for heavy water will pay dividends.

No district wants to experience the pain of a major mold event in their schools. Being pro-active in managing the mold risks will help to ensure you don't find yourself in that place.