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# Maine Indoor Air Quality Council Recommendation for Dealing with a Mold/Moisture Problem in Rental Properties

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The Maine Indoor Air Quality Council developed this document with input from landlords, tenants, and public health, legal, and building code professionals. It lists:

- Best practices to address moisture problems in rental properties;
- Specific actions and timelines to protect tenant health and reduce landlord property damage and financial loss;
- Strategies for landlords and tenants to work together to identify and fix mold and dampness problems in rental units.

Timely, proper action during liquid water events can reduce the risk of property loss and occupant health problems due to mold growth.

Help us make this document better! The Maine Indoor Air Quality Council asks that you take a few minutes after reviewing this guidance to tell us what you think. Do you have ideas for making the process better? Would you be willing to use the guidance as part of a “pilot” study to determine its value? [Click here to take a brief survey.](#)



## Background

1. Mold is everywhere in our environment, both indoors and outdoors.
2. Mold becomes a problem when it takes root and actively grows indoors.
3. Mold can damage a building and make tenants sick.
4. Mold indoors can affect the health of some, but not all, people.

Scientific studies of indoor mold and health identifies the following health effects:

- Itchy eyes, runny nose, headaches, skin rashes
  - Allergies
  - Worse asthma
  - Infections in individuals with serious or life-long illness *Most symptoms are temporary and will go away once a mold problem is fixed.*
5. Mold needs moisture in order to grow and survive. The best way to reduce mold exposure is by controlling moisture. Moisture problems may happen in buildings when:
    - Outdoor water leaks through the roof, foundation, windows, or walls
    - Humidity indoors causes condensation.
    - Plumbing leaks inside your unit
    - Drains get plugged
    - Housekeeping is poor or inadequate
  6. Mold growths, or colonies, can start to grow on a damp surface within **24 to 48 hours**.
  7. To effectively address a mold problem in indoors:
    - First, fix the moisture problem causing the mold growth
    - Second, remove moisture damaged material
    - Third, properly clean and repair the area
  8. Using chemicals to kill mold spores may not protect people from getting sick. Mold does not have to be alive to cause health problems.
  9. When repairing a moisture problem and doing mold clean up, it is very important to follow best practices for:
    - Assessment
    - Containment
    - Waste disposal and cleaning
    - Repair

Following best practices is very important to protect workers and prevent spreading mold spores to the rest of the building. Guidance is available through the following resources, or hire the services of an educated, experienced professional.



*Resources:*

- [U.S. EPA Guide for Mold Remediation in Schools & Commercial Buildings](#)
  - [NYC Dept. of Health Guidelines for Assessment & Remediation of Fungi in Indoor Environments](#)
  - [www.maineindoorair.org/mold](http://www.maineindoorair.org/mold)
10. Fixing moisture problems quickly reduces the risk that tenants will get sick from mold and reduces the landlord's cost of proper repair and cleanup. See attached table of projected cost of mold damage assessment and clean-up.



## About Landlord-Tenant Communications

Landlords and tenants must know how to communicate with each other. Knowing when to reach out to one another will help:

1. reduce property damage when mold and dampness problems occur; and
2. Protect the health of current and future tenants through prompt, proper attention to a mold and dampness problem.

The Maine Indoor Air Quality Council recommends that all communications between landlords and tenants be put in writing – either by e-mail or U.S. mail. In the event that “emergency” situations occur, such as the liquid water events described below, it is best for landlords and tenants to communicate by phone first. After talking on the phone, follow-up with an e-mail or letter.

When landlords tell tenants about their expectations for communication prior to signing the lease, it can greatly improve the landlord-tenant relationship. Landlords can ask tenants to contact them as soon as they notice problems indoors that can damage the physical property or affect tenant health and safety. Prompt written replies can ease tenant concerns.



## How to Address Mold & Moisture Problem in Rental Properties

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### Tenant Responsibilities

*For Liquid Water Events:*

1. Notify\* Landlord Immediately.

Liquid water leaks are emergency situations. When liquid water is entering the unit in any location, notify the landlord IMMEDIATELY. When you tell your landlord about liquid water leaking in, this gives your landlord permission to enter your unit immediately to investigate the problem.

*\* Notification can be by phone, but it is best to follow up in writing (by e-mail or by US mail)*

2. Allow Access.

Allow access by landlord's workers to fix any water leaks in the building, to remove wet materials, and to clean and repair the area. The landlord may need access to your unit due to another unit with a liquid leak.

*For Mold/Mold Odor Issues:*

When a tenant finds an area of visible mold growth or a consistent moldy odor in their unit:

1. Check the unit very well. Look for moisture and odor sources such as:

- Wet clothing or laundry
- Rotten foods
- Unemptied trash
- Uncleaned spills
- Pet Waste
- Refrigerator Drip Pans
- Carpeting

2. Notify Landlord.

If visible mold growth or moldy odor is either unrelated to a "housekeeping" issue or cannot be found, then notify\* your landlord as soon as possible (within 5 business days).

*\* Notification can be by phone, but it is best to follow up in writing (by e-mail or by US mail)*



3. Allow Access.

After receiving reasonable notice\* by the landlord, give the landlord or the landlord's workers access to the unit to fix the mold or moisture problem.

*\*state law presumes 24 hours written notice*

4. Complete tasks when requested.

Tenants can help resolve problems if they complete any and all tasks requested of them by the landlord or the landlord's workers. This might include:

- Run kitchen and bath fans regularly
- Help to clean the area
- Use a dehumidifier
- Other moisture management tasks as requested by the landlord

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## Landlord Responsibilities

*For Liquid Water Events:*

1. Liquid water events are emergency situations. When told by a tenant of a liquid water event in a unit, respond immediately. Do everything possible to stop or limit the leaking, even if only temporarily. This could be:
  - Turning off the water to a leaking pipe,
  - clearing an ice dam on the roof,
  - patching up holes,
  - unplugging clogged drains
  - patch roofing
  - cover with tarp
  - using portable pumps
2. To prevent mold growth, remove or dry all wet materials within 12-24 hours. (see page 11 in [the EPA mold remediation guide](#) for strategies for specific wetted materials). If a material has been wet for more than 48 hours or if the timeline of wetness is unknown, the material is damaged and should be removed rather than dried or cleaned.
3. Repair the source of the water leak.
4. Clean and repair affected areas.



*For Mold Growth/Mold Odors:*

1. Inspect.

As soon as possible, but within 5 business days after notification by tenant, check the unit for evidence of mold growth and moldy odors, as well as presence of or evidence of long-term moisture problems: water leaks, condensation, plumbing leaks, high humidity, and staining.

2. Create a Repair Plan

If necessary, within 5 business days from your inspection after a tenant complaint, develop a written repair and clean-up plan that follows generally accepted best practice principles for the clean-up and repair of the mold and moisture problem.\* Share the plan with the tenant and ask for their help in the process, such as by giving access to the unit, using kitchen and bath fans, and other daily activities to minimize moisture.

*\* Following best practices will help protect workers and prevent spreading mold spores to the rest of the building. Guidance is available through the following resources, or hire the services of an educated, experienced professional.*

Resources:

- [U.S. EPA Guide for Mold Remediation in Schools & Commercial Buildings](#)
- [NYC Dept. of Health Guidelines for Assessment & Remediation of Fungi in Indoor Environments](#)

3. Assist Tenants

Help tenants alternative housing during clean up and repair if required to ensure the health and safety of the tenant:

- Tenants who have health effects from mold exposure can be further harmed by the clean-up and repair process.
- Cleaning and repair work often requires significant demolition which makes the living space unsafe for any tenant.

Please tell the Maine Indoor Air Quality Council your thoughts about this document.

[Click here to take a brief survey.](#)