

Time to be
Proactive
Against
Mold



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As builders of homes in which families experience major life events, there is more and more responsibility put upon us. Not only do we need to give our client's excellent value, we are also required to stay on top of the ever-changing technology and resources that come down the pike. The general public looks to us as the experts and expects us to build the very best home for the dollars they can spend.

Builders are finding themselves inundated with a great deal of information about new materials and products. Experts are forever telling us what is the best, the most cost-effective, the most energy-efficient and the newest in construction technology. There probably are times that we just want to throw up our hands and say — enough. Sifting it all out and knowing which information to use and which to disregard can be quite a challenge.

It sometimes seems enticing to go back to the *good old days* when construction seemed simpler. Unfortunately, that is not possible, and where mold is concerned we can't continue to pretend the problem doesn't exist. Now that we know the tremendous damage *the culprit* can do both to a home and to its occupants, one of the things we can do is encourage design that minimizes the possibility of leaks which, of course, can create the potential for mold.

Great designs can create a challenge when putting a house together that is tight and seamless. Recently, I heard a speaker say, "The good old box-style house, built properly, had the least potential for leaks." He continued, "The bigger the house, the more angles and cuts in the roof, the more chance for leaks." He finished with, "The more expensive the design, the more potential for leaks." Designing a home on paper is quite a different matter from actually orchestrating its existence.

After spending countless hours researching and talking to numerous consultants including Doug Garrett (Austin) as well as staff from the Austin Green Builder Program to identify conditions we found in one of the homes we are remodeling, we have come to the conclusion that a proactive position on the issue of mold is extremely critical.

Additionally, it is important to understand that mold isn't just generated from a leaky roof or windows and doors that aren't flashed properly. For that matter, chimneys and roof vents, outside material changes or space underneath the foundation aren't the only culprits. Improper heating and cooling equipment and improper venting also create these hazardous conditions.

Teaching Consumer Maintenance

Building a home properly and well isn't where we should stop. We shouldn't assume that each

home we turn over to its owner is going to be properly maintained throughout the years. Homeowners have their own "handyman" abilities and perception of what home maintenance is all about. Additionally, so many of our homeowners are working couples and don't seem to have time for the little stuff. I know in my own personal life it would be great to have access to a service such as rent-a-wife or rent-a-husband to do all the little things that we rarely have time to do, i.e., take care of home maintenance services.

A car purchased from a manufacturer comes, not only with warranty information but also a maintenance schedule. So should the homes we build. It is incorrect to assume that the homeowner to whom we hand over the keys really understands what maintenance is all about. Some, even third and fourth time homebuyers don't really understand the consequences of overlooking water issues in their home. They don't understand what is wrong with a little mold and mildew. As long as the stuff stays put behind the laundry tub, out of sight under the carpet, or only peeks around the edge of the bathroom tile or wallpaper, who cares? Well, they should. These organisms are not only eating away at their house, they could also be eating away at their health.

Mold is everywhere and it needs to consume something to survive. It's perfectly happy eating away at your client's house, if they let it. Some molds and mildews are fond of the cellulose in the paper backing on drywall, insulation and wallpaper. Others have a ravenous appetite for the glues used to bond carpet to its backing. Left unchecked, mold eventually destroys the parts of the drywall, wallpaper and carpet it attacks. But, many molds just like to feast on the everyday dust and dirt that gathers in regions of a home that are perpetually moist.

These wonderful microscopic organisms containing enzymes (responsible for digesting and decomposing) and spores (in charge of reproduction) dwell within the fungi kingdom. The realm includes mushrooms, yeast and other seemingly unsavory characters. The truth is, these decay organisms aren't unsavory at all. Without them, toppled trees, dead animals and fallen vegetables wouldn't decompose. Our land would get piled higher and higher with dead stuff. We wouldn't have foods and medicines like cheese and penicillin. The problems arise when mold starts chomping away at things we don't want them to — affecting the look, smell and structural integrity of our homes.

Mold won't destroy a house, but it can make it look, feel and smell bad. Mold can mar walls with white spider web-like growths or clusters of small black specks. It creates the smell we often refer to as "musty." It can be slippery and dangerous when it grows on damp basement

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stairs. Molds and their fungal cousins can, when left unchecked rot wood or do structural damage.

Mold needs moisture to get established, grow and reproduce. Mold problems and long-standing moisture or high-humidity conditions go hand in hand. To conquer it, you must also conquer moisture problems.

Assume that your clients don't have a clue as to what home maintenance is. Don't just build their home and do warranty work that is contractual. Provide your homeowners with a checklist, maintenance schedule, even instruc-

tions to help them take care of this tremendous investment. No matter what the price of the home, it is probably the most expensive purchase they have made in their lifetime.

Develop a maintenance program for your homeowners that is simple to maintain. Orient them to understand that a few simple correction steps, done in a quick and timely manner can save them great sums of money in the future. They must understand that good home maintenance can save them from long-term severe health problems. Training your homeowners to understand that you are turn-

ing over a *livable piece of art* that will only continue to appreciate in value as long as they maintain it will enable you to sleep better at night.

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Following is an example of a maintenance schedule that Katz Builders distributes to its clients when they turn over the house. Other items may also need maintenance.

Katz Builders, Inc. Maintenance Schedule

Item	Monthly	Quarterly	Semiannually	Annually	Comment
Clean and test smoke alarms	x				
Test and reset all GFCIs	x				
Clean and change furnace filter	x				or as directed by the manufacturer's literature
Inspect heat system			x		early in the fall
Inspect air conditioning system			x		early in the spring
Inspect site drainage			x		
Seal exterior concrete cracks			x		
Inspect exterior paint or stain			x		
Touch up caulk			x		
Touch up grout			x		
Lube garage overhead door and tighten bolts			x		
Drain some water from bottom of water heater				x	or as directed by the manufacturer's literature
Clean gutters			x		
Operate pressure relief valve on water heater				x	
Clean window weep holes			x		or as needed
Clean masonry weep holes			x		
Inspect roof & chimney flashings			x		
Inspect behind refrigerator & icemaker for leakage	x				
Inspect hoses for washing machine		x			
Inspect wall behind washing machine for moisture	x				
Inspect under dishwasher for leaks	x				
Inspect hot water heater pan		x			
Inspect humidifier pan		x			
Inspect caulking around windows and doors			x		
Chimney cleaning				x	or as needed
Test for air quality/mold				x	