



Housekeeping

by Nataka A. Gluszko

Preventing mold and mildew growth presents unique challenges

Another great article from *The Rooms Chronicle*, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com

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Aside from unattractive stains, foul odors, and expensive repairs, mold and mildew growth presents the possibility of serious health problems. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), mold growth produces allergens, irritants, and in some instances toxic substances. Mold can also irritate eyes, skin, nose, throat, and lungs for both those who are allergic to mold, and those who have no known allergy to mold.

Housekeepers, maintenance engineers and general managers all need to be aware of the signs associated with mold and mildew growth in order to ensure a completely comfortable stay for all guests. Since mold and mildew grow where moisture is present, the most common area to see signs of mold and mildew growth is in the bathroom. Common signs include discoloration of surfaces exposed to high moisture content, a musty and moldy smelling odor, higher than average complaints of illness, and a slimy texture.

Extensive use of bathroom appliances allows for moisture and humidity — crucial elements to promote the growth of mold and mildew — to build up in the bathroom and guestroom. While limiting the number of showers a guest can take is not wise and impractical, there are other ways to prevent mold and mildew growth, and to repair existing damage.

Keeping it dry

Although the EPA states that mold and mold spores cannot be eliminated completely, there are steps that housekeepers can take to reduce the likelihood of mold growth. The easiest preventative step is to make sure all items are dry. Check to make sure there isn't excessive water near the bathtub or shower, that garbage cans are free of liquids, that there are no signs of water damage on the ceiling or walls, and that carpeted areas near the bathroom and windows are dry. Also, make sure housekeepers regularly check windows and pipes for leaks. If leaks or excessive moisture is present, notify the appropriate individuals to take care of the situation.

Another step in the prevention of mold and mildew growth is keeping a close eye on absorbent and porous items. Again, check carpeted areas for signs of water damage. In addition, cloth and plastic shower curtains have a high potential for mold growth since they are exposed to moisture constantly. Cloth curtains are very absorbent and tend to dry slowly; plastic curtains can fold over to prevent moist areas from drying properly.

Housekeepers should constantly check to see that shower curtains are drying thoroughly and are not showing any signs of mold or mildew growth. If mold and mildew growth is present, housekeepers can either replace existing curtains with new ones, or they can bleach the curtains. Bleaching will help to kill and remove mold, as well as brighten shower curtains.

Other items that are especially porous yet overlooked are bathroom counters, showers, and bathtubs. Porous materials used for countertops allow for moisture and humidity to seep deep into surfaces, offering ideal conditions for mold to grow. Likewise, porous tiles used for the shower and bathtub area provide exceptional opportunities for mold growth, especially since they are constantly exposed to high humidity. In addition to porous tiles, the shower and bathtub areas usually have grout between the tiles. These

Pictured right: Moisture vents help prevent mold and mildew by allowing humidity that would be trapped in guest bathrooms to be diverted outside the hotel.



surfaces are annoying to clean efficiently and are therefore perfect areas for mold growth.

To prevent mold and mildew from growing on these surfaces, use cleaning sprays and tools specifically designed to eliminate mold spores and destroy mold that is already growing. Also, make sure that during the deep-cleaning process housekeepers pay close attention to corners, grout, and the shower, tub, and counter for signs of mold growth. If re-modeling is an option, make sure to choose bathroom counters, showers, and tubs which are non-porous and grout-free. A good example is DuPont™ Bath Surfaces; DuPont™ offers surfaces that are both non-porous and free of grout.

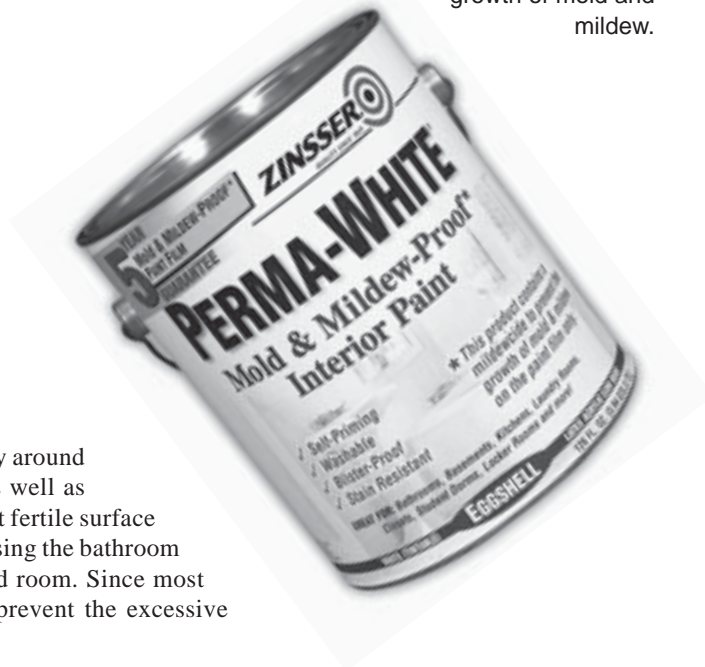
An essential step to prevent mold and moisture damage in guest bathrooms is to install exhaust fans or moisture vents. Without these ventilation outlets, humidity will be trapped in the bathroom until the door is open, thus subjecting every surface in the bath to unwanted moisture buildup.

Bathroom ceilings

Don't forget to pay close attention to the ceiling in the guest bath, especially around the shower/bathtub area. The steam associated with long, hot showers as well as humidity's propensity to rise probably makes the bathroom ceiling the most fertile surface for mold and mildew growth. Given that most guests close the door when using the bathroom or showering, it is very easy for steam to become trapped in the confined room. Since most guestroom ceilings are painted with flat paint, there is little barrier to prevent the excessive moisture from being absorbed by the ceiling substrate.

To create a vapor barrier on ceilings and other painted surfaces, semi-gloss or high gloss enamel paint should be used. Zinsser Company offers a mold and mildew-proof paint specifically formulated for residential and commercial bathrooms. Known as Perma-White®, the latex paint comes in eggshell, satin and semi-gloss finish and is highly resistant to peeling and blistering.

Pictured below: Perma-White® by Zinsser is an ideal vapor-barrier coating for hotel bathrooms that incorporates a mildewcide to prevent the growth of mold and mildew.



Mold remediation

Besides removing water-damaged carpets and countertops, there are other, less expensive, methods to remove mold. If the damage and mold growth is not too extensive, less than ten square feet, the house-keeping department will be able to take care of the situation. Make sure housekeepers use special solutions designed to kill and remove mold and that won't cause further damage to the surfaces on which the mold is growing on. However, if mold growth and damage is widespread, then professionals need to be called. The EPA recommends hiring a contractor or cleaner that has experience in the killing and removal of mold.

Mold and mildew growth should not be taken lightly. This is a serious problem that can cause considerable, and expensive, problems for hotels. Although the costs for replacing and fixing items that are damaged by mold can be costly, the main concern for hotels should be the health of guests and employees. Proper steps need to be taken to assure that mold growth is kept to an absolute minimum. Existing mold growth needs to be removed in order to eliminate dangerous health risks. For more information about indoor air quality and mold, visit the EPA's website at <http://www.epa.gov/mold/>. ✧

(Natalka A. Gluszko is an honors student at Niagara University's College of Hospitality and Tourism Management where she is specializing in hotel management. Her practical experience includes working at the renown Hotel Barchetta Excelsior located in Como, Italy. She may be contacted at: editor@roomschronicle.com.)

Hot tip

The EPA has published a free online booklet titled, "Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings." This publication presents guidelines for the remediation/cleanup of mold and moisture problems in commercial buildings, including hotels. It has been designed primarily for building managers, plant engineers, and others who are responsible for commercial building maintenance. Using this document, individuals with little or no experience with mold remediation should be able to make a reasonable judgment as to whether their mold situation can be handled in-house. The publication can be viewed and downloaded at:

http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold_remediation.html