

Building IAQ Investigation & Assessment

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Investigation of building air quality is a complicated issue and requires much skill on the part of the investigator. There are too many sources for misinformation which makes the investigators job even more difficult. Consumers, in many cases have expectations that are based on misinformation and expect results based on those misconceptions. This is why we feel that an initial interview with building owners and/or occupants is critical in an IAQ investigation and this is where we begin. After completing the interview with the building owner we can proceed with some idea of what problems may be present. The next step is the building walk-through, or what we call a limited visual assessment. During this visual assessment we begin to develop some hypotheses concerning the problems which may be present and the causes of those problems. All too often, so-called investigators, certified mold inspectors, etc. want to rush right in to take 2 or 3 tape lift samples and call that an investigation. **Avoid Such Companies!!** First, the problem may not be mold, and second there may be many other contributing factors.

The first thing an experienced investigator will tell you is that thinking you know the answer before a thorough investigation means that you do not understand the problem. Building air quality is made of many constituents and each of those requires thought during an investigation. If your investigator does any different, he may simply be taking your money. I have investigated many mold remediation projects where a company has allegedly remediated a mold problem but never mentioned the cause to the client. To perform a remediation of anything, without knowing the cause is an exercise in futility. The problem will surely return.

The reasons stated are why we ALWAYS begin our investigations with interviews and a walk-through of the suspected building. In many cases, during this walk-through we begin to visually see the problems in the building and make suggestions about correcting problems. Many times that is all it takes. If we must proceed to a more in-depth assessment of the building, we now are armed with our interviews and notes from the walk-through which we use to develop hypotheses about the problems and causes of the problems. From there we may proceed to sampling and other assessment procedures such as destructive investigation of inaccessible areas of the building, a thorough evaluation of the HVAC system and it's components, etc. This is the part of the investigation where skill on the part of the investigator is a MUST.

Your investigator should understand their abilities and limitations. The investigator should be considering such questions as:

- What are the budget requirements of the project and can I expect to find answers on that budget?
- What are the manpower requirements of the project? Is my company capable of providing such expertise? If not, do I have business associates that I trust to perform that end of the investigation that I may refer the owner to?
- What equipment will be required to perform the project? Do I have the equipment and the expertise to use it?
- Is all equipment in proper working order, including being calibrated to primary standard, etc.?
- What notification requirements must be met in regard to building occupants? Or can my investigation be carried discreetly without causing panic?
- What is the purpose of the investigation? The purpose will play a large role in requirement. If health issues are involved medical professionals may be needed. If legal issues are involved, attorneys may be involved. If cause/effect relationships are to be established a Certified Industrial Hygienist may be required. If construction defects are involved, a construction expert may be required, etc.....
- Should the building be evacuated?

- Am I or my employee's in danger?

These are all questions that should be addressed for any project no matter what size the project is. Many so-called "certified mold experts", etc. today consider none of those questions. This could be both dangerous and costly.

Many of my clients ask, but the mold remediation company said I will get a five year guaranty. That's great, but a guaranty for what? In my opinion many of the guarantees are not worth the paper they're printed on. What if mold is not the problem? What if the cause was not addressed? What is the water that caused the mold is structurally damaging the building? Did he tell you that mold need not be viable to pose a health risk? As you can see, your so-called mold expert has left many unanswered questions.

The Closer Look Inspections strategy is to answer as many of those questions as possible without wasting our client's money and/or resources. Have we met that goal? We feel that having performed inspections, investigations, environmental assessments and expert testimony for over 4000 clients without litigation and very few complaints speaks for itself. We do what we say without smoke and mirrors.

Please feel free to call us at (440) 946-7191 to discuss investigations or proactive programs we have developed which could save you money, reduce liabilities, make properties more attractive to tenants or make properties more sellable.