

## **WEEKLY SAFETY TIP – 5/10/10 – DO’S AND DON’TS OF CONTROLLING MOLD**

Spring showers can bring more than just spring flowers. It can increase the potential for mold to grow, at your worksite and at home. Mold is more than what grows on the forgotten food in the back of your refrigerator. It is a form of fungus, with microscopic cells called “spores” that exist in the air we breathe. Most mold spores are not harmful, and few cause any effects beyond allergic reactions like watery eyes. However, for those with respiratory problems like asthma, pregnant women, older workers, or those with compromised immune systems or autoimmune diseases, these spores can become a real problem.

What is the best way to control mold? According to a guidance document from OSHA, and according to the EPA, the best way to prevent harmful mold and its cousin, mildew, is to control moisture. A good ventilation system goes a long way in reducing the harmful effects of mold and mildew. In fact, ventilation and moisture control is preferred over bleach and biocides. To see and download guidance booklets from the EPA, (English and Spanish) follow this link: <http://www.epa.gov/mold/index.html>.

Why isn’t bleach the preferred method of controlling mold? Because just killing the spores does not solve the problem. Dead spores can still trigger allergic reactions and cause harmful health effects. What can you do? If the problem is severe enough, call a mold/mildew removal professional. If you do elect to use chlorine bleach or a biocide, follow some simple do’s and don’t’s.

**Do** – remove all moisture from the area. Remember, this is one of the most effective methods of mold control. Repair all plumbing problems, maintain all HVAC systems, control the condensation drips off the air conditioners. Provide adequate drainage around buildings, following building codes.

**Don’t** – just use a biocide, such as chlorine bleach is not enough, in fact, the EPA recommends against it as a routine practice in most cases, unless used by a professional! It is less effective, as mold spores can still remain after the cleaning process. Even if you sterilize an area, dead mold spores can remain.

**Do** – ventilate the area when using any commercial product for mold control. Open windows, use a fan, do something to increase air movement.

**Don’t** – mix chlorine bleach with any ammonia product. This can create toxic vapors!

**Do** – keep unauthorized people (at home, your children and pets) out of the area when using a biocide.

**Don’t** – eat, drink or smoke in areas where there might be a mold or mildew contamination.

**Do** – think that mold can be everywhere and wash your hands frequently, especially before eating, smoking, applying makeup, or using a restroom.

To read the guidance document on mold from OSHA, follow this link:  
<http://www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib101003.html>.