



## **Urgent Need for Comprehensive Measures to Address Indoor Mold and Water-Damaged Buildings: A Change the Air Coalition Position Statement**

Exposure to dampness, moisture and mold in buildings poses significant public health and economic risks to our population. Damp and water-damaged building exposure is linked to adverse health effects, primarily related to respiratory complications from mold spore reactions, such as allergic rhinitis, allergic bronchopulmonary aspergillosis, and treatment resistant asthma.

Water-damaged, moisture-damaged, and damp indoor environments not only impact our health, but also cause significant physical, emotional, and financial hardship to those exposed. What's worse, water damage is not always a visible problem and can be hidden behind walls and in places not often frequented, such as attics and crawl spaces. Many individuals who may be suffering from chronic health symptoms are unaware that the culprit behind their degrading health rests within these hazardous indoor spaces.

Mold is a preventable public health risk. Action is needed for increased protection of the public to prevent exposure to damp and moisture-damaged buildings.

The Change the Air Coalition strongly recommends the following legislative and policy approaches for State Legislatures and Congress:

- Public health awareness programs and information regarding mold and water damage through appropriate State and Federal agencies.
- Disclosures regarding mold and water damage for residential, commercial, and industrial real property.
- Certification requirements for mold assessors and remediators, similar to lead, asbestos and radon.
- Increased funding and appropriations for further research to the health and economic impacts from mold and water damage.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that the average American spends over 90% of their time indoors.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. EPA's research also indicates that air pollutants can be 2 - 5 times - even up to 100 times - higher indoors than outdoor levels.<sup>2</sup>

These statistics paint an important picture: We spend more time indoors than ever before breathing in air that can be unsafe for our health and well-being.

Beyond the personal suffering of any one individual, the economic cost to society attributable to dampness and mold is estimated to be \$3.7 billion for allergic rhinitis, \$1.9 billion for acute bronchitis, \$15.1 billion for asthma morbidity, and \$1.7 billion for asthma mortality.<sup>3</sup> These are preventable costs.

Other non-respiratory symptoms are additionally reported in peer-reviewed published studies, likely related to inhalational exposure to microbial metabolites and mycotoxins. These involve neurological, immunosuppressive, and carcinogenic aspects. Mold mycotoxins have been linked to cancers<sup>4</sup>, birth defects, and dementia. Medical literature suggests that inhalational exposure to mycotoxins increases susceptibility to viral infections and viral related lung damage.

People exposed to a building with hidden mold infestation may remain symptomatic after being removed from the exposure, requiring treatment for recovery, further increasing the economic cost.

The prevalence of mold in buildings is widespread. In a major cross-sectional study conducted by the US Environmental Protection Agency of 100 randomly selected office buildings from across the country, and from which buildings with known air quality issues were excluded, sampling data showed that 85% of the buildings had past water-damage and 43 percent had current water leaks. The Occupational and Safety Health Administration estimates that over 25 percent of homes have had enough water damage to host toxigenic indoor molds.

Additionally, a better understanding of the presence of molds in the U.S. housing stock comes from a pair of studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – the American Healthy Homes Survey (AHHS) I and II, performed in 2007 and 2019 respectively - which evaluated randomly selected homes across the country for various health hazards, including lead, radon, asbestos, and mold.

Data from AHHS I and II indicates that the vast majority of our homes have significant water-damage, resulting in high levels of mold. Furthermore, reviewing the associated prevalence data, it was noted that 34 of the 36 mold species evaluated increased significantly in prevalence between AHHS I and II, indicating this serious problem is getting steadily worse.<sup>5</sup>

Our organizations believe that safe indoor air is a basic human right. Mold, dampness, excess moisture, and water damage pose an incredibly serious, but entirely preventable risk to public health. Additionally, the economic burden caused by these indoor environments are substantial, yet completely preventable as well. Comprehensive measures to address these issues are crucial for safeguarding the health and well-being of individuals and communities around the country, and we believe they should be treated with the same seriousness as lead, asbestos, and radon to ensure improved indoor air quality and healthier living environments.

We strongly urge policymakers, legislators, and public health entities to take action *now* to increase protections of the public from indoor damp and water-damaged buildings. Taking these measures will pave the way for improved indoor air quality, healthier living environments, and most importantly, the well-being of our communities.

Signed by:

**Brandon Chappo**  
**Director of Public Policy**  
**Change the Air Foundation**

**Kate Needham**  
**Executive Director**  
**Armed Forces Housing Advocates (AFHA)**

**Kathleen Mulligan**  
**Executive Director**  
**National Association of Environmental Medicine (NAEM)**

**Robbie Bradshaw**  
**Director of Government Relations**  
**Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC)**

**Michael Conn**  
**Executive Director**  
**Building Biology Institute (BBI)**

**Doug Farquhar**  
**Director of Government Affairs**  
**National Environmental Health Association (NEHA)**

**Beth Lambert**  
**Executive Director**  
**Epidemic Answers**

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