

Removal and replacement of mould contaminated plasterboard

David Cant, a refreshingly pragmatic safety + risk management professional, discusses the importance of following a health and safety process to protect people when removing and replacing mould contaminated plasterboard.

When disturbed mould spores become airborne. Exposure to mould has the potential to cause throat irritation, nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, cough and wheezing and skin irritation. Operatives with chronic lung diseases are at higher risk and will experience more severe reactions when exposed to mould.

It is important to note that effects on health can vary depending on the type of mould, the level of exposure, and the individual's sensitivity to mould. People with pre-existing health conditions, such as asthma or a weakened immune system, may be more susceptible to the health hazards of mouldy plasterboard.

Suggested control measures

Before assignment to tasks involving the removal of mould contaminated plasterboard, operatives should be health screened for asthma or any respiratory and/or breathing disorders. People with any respiratory and/or breathing disorders must not carry out this task.

If the mould infestation is extensive, it is best to call a professional to assess the situation and take the necessary steps for remediation.

All individuals involved must be Face Fit Tested. Additional PPE must be worn such as an FFP3 respirator, disposable coverall, and protective goggles or glasses to BSEN166F. The operative should take

regular breaks when working in FFP3 masks of at least 10 minutes after every hour. If the operatives are unable to shave consider fitting them with a positive pressure respirator with THP2 filtration.

For more information see:

www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment

A high level of hygiene must be maintained by operatives, washing hands and face immediately after breaking from the task before eating, drinking or smoking.

Where the materials have dried out, damping down of materials to suppress levels of dust and mould spores to reduce airborne contamination using a hand pressure sprayer should be carried out.

When removing contaminated materials, it is important to consider that mould growth spreads quickly. It is advisable to remove 300mm past the visibly affected area to be confident of eliminating the potential for further spread.

Third party exposure to airborne contaminants

The operational area should be cordoned off prior to the commencement of works signage to be displayed eg, no entry, authorised personnel only and mandatory PPE to be worn.

Notify other trades and visitors of ongoing works and restrictions to areas.

Suggested removal procedure

Prior to starting work ensure utility services are fully isolated, appropriate signs and barriers are in place and operatives understand the RAMS. The work could be in a permit controlled area.

1. Identify the source of the moisture

Before removing the mould, you need to find and fix the source of the moisture causing it. This could be a leaky pipe, an external damp problem, or high humidity in the room.

2. Protect people

Mould can be harmful to your health, so it's important to protect people by supplying and ensuring they are wearing coveralls, gloves, a face mask, and goggles or at least low impact safety glasses. In addition, its essential a high level of hygiene is maintained by washing hands and face and immediately breaking from the task before eating, drinking or smoking. If the task is extensive consider job rotation with other operatives through tasks in the same vicinity.

3. Remove the affected plasterboard

If the mould is extensive to reduce the risk of the spores becoming airborne during the removal process clean off the spores with a fungicidal wash Use a drywall saw or utility knife to cut away and remove the affected plasterboard. Be sure to remove all of the mouldy material, including any that may be behind the plasterboard, 300mm beyond the affected area is recommended.

4. Dispose of the mouldy material

The mouldy material must be placed in plastic bags, sealed, and disposed of as harmful waste. If the volume of plasterboard is impractical to bag use an identified skip and removed as controlled waste. Check with the manufacturer to see if the waste can be recycled.

5. Clean the area

Use an anti-fungicidal wash solution to clean the area where the mould was removed. This will help to kill any remaining mould spores and disinfect the area.

6. Allow the area to dry completely

Before replacing the plasterboard, ensure the area is completely dry. Use a dehumidifier or fan to speed up the drying process.

7. Replace the plasterboard

Once the area is dry, replace the plasterboard with new or mould-resistant materials.

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