

Tales from the Crawlspace

By: Scott Harris

Propertyexam

SPRING AT LAST! Oh heaven's I certainly hope so by the time you're reading this... In the early spring it's time for all of us to plan our annual "dry weather chores". There is always home maintenance that is best dealt with when the weather is dryer. Additionally, in the spring everything grows, absolutely everything. As the flowers bloom and we turn our smiles up and open our windows to take in some fresh air (now and then). There are also many unwanted things that start to grow better now as well. Lots of pollen in the air, it's a good time to replace furnace air filters more frequently and to consider putting in a better, tighter or HEPA type filter. Mold grows now too. 75% of all the calls I receive to diagnose mold problems come in the spring. I suspect most people would think it's a bigger issue in the winter when our houses are closed up and it's raining more. However, the furnace on wit forced air heat tends to keep things dry inside at least the air. If there are heavy moisture intrusion problems this won't stop mold growth but milder issues can be held in check by the dry air of forced draft heating. Everything that makes the flowers bloom in the spring, makes the mold grow as well. I also think that we all become more aware of the smells around us at this time, when most of the air begins to smell so wonderful. Regardless, now is often the time when people begin to notice the odors associated with mildew and mold. First, DON'T PANIC! (For you hitchhiker's guide fans). Most mold issues are really only "housekeeping" issues. This does not mean you're a bad housekeeper, it just means that the mold or mildew isn't pervasive enough to require professional remediation. I recommend a product called **Sporicidin**® Antimicrobial Soap to all my clients. It's used in most hospitals as a regular cleaner (don't worry it won't make your house smell like a hospital, yuck). Sporicidin is not very expensive and a terrific, true antimicrobial to have around. You can order it online to be delivered to your house or pick it up at most medical supply stores. DO NOT USE BLEACH! Bleach is actually mostly water, it will kill the surface mold but it can

actually feed the imbedded mold spores and make it come back even worse. Besides it smells horrible and ruins your hands.

Anyway, clean up and black or brown mildew or mold looking deposits. If the situation seems to be too significant to simply clean up, or you are unable to determine the source of the moisture intrusion, call an expert. Mold isn't mold unless a qualified lab runs tests on samples taken by a technician. I also do Thermal imaging scans and trace moisture intrusion with moisture meters in order to find the true source of the problem. I do not recommend simply trying to remediate the "damage" the repair costs can somehow skyrocket and once you're in to it, it's harder to figure out what went wrong. I don't believe most people or companies are dishonest but I do have a fundamental problem with mold remediation companies to test and diagnose mold problems and then profit from the repair work. If it seems like it might be a conflict, it probably is. There are several other testing/diagnosis options, Propertyexam is only one. I only recommend you find out as much as you can about what you are dealing with before someone starts tearing out walls and flooring. Just a thought...

Besides potential mold issues, plan your annual dry weather maintenance. I'll talk more about these things in detail next month. When you get a week of dry weather, someone needs to go up on your roof and clean off any debris. If you have moss up there, broom it off (should have moss treated the roof in the fall within the last 3-5 years). Inspect for cracks in the exposed sealant. Plan to do some roofing seal service by the end of summer. Sometime soon it will be a good time to pressure wash or clean off any decks or siding that are discolored. If you have siding that has any moss on it, you can get a terrific "spray on and forget" product at home depot or shipped to you. It just connects to your hose and you can spray it on the cladding. Within a week or so, all the fungus will simply fall away. Have a look at your exposed woodwork. This includes wood decking, railing, siding trim (or siding itself) window & door trim, roof soffit & fascia trim. If you can clearly see the grain in painted wood, or the wood itself, plan on painting or touch up painting before next fall. If your stained decking hasn't been stained in the last 3 years or so, plan on staining it again. New home buyers, most likely your wood deck or fence wasn't stained originally or only got a light staining.

Usually builders don't stain decking because it "takes" better if it's allowed to "season" a little. Don't go through another winter without getting a good stain seal on the wood surfaces. Often people decide to let cedar decking and fencing alone to turn grey. This is a poor choice in our climate. It shortens the expected useful service life of the deck or fence considerably. Fungus gets into the wood and accelerates deterioration. A nicely stained deck can last indefinitely if you take care of it. Everybody let's get out and enjoy the spring season and break out the barbeque! If it's still raining when you read this, send me an email & I'll reply with plans for an Arc.