Mold Contractors Wanted
By Don Procter

A year ago I devoted this space to the subject of toxic mold. Awareness in Greater Toronto continues to spread as a result of a number of recent cases in which mold has wreaked havoc on commercial buildings and tenants) health.

As news of this hot environmental issue spreads, a large specialized work force will be required for mold remediation. But some industry experts fear that Toronto will witness a shortage of qualified removal specialists if the industry doesn’t address the issue of training and of standard guidelines for removal procedures.

Hugh Laird, executive director of the Interior Systems Contractors Association of Ontario, sees toxic mold as the major environmental issue over the next five years in the Toronto area. To prepare for it, he hopes to get funding from the Canadian federal and Ontario provincial governments for a training centre for mold remediation work.

Don Bremner of Restoration Environmental Contractors, a major environmental contractor in the Toronto market, thinks Laird has a good idea. But his concern is that Ontario needs to set up standard remediation guidelines first. It seems that for just about every mold consultant and contractor out there, there is a different remediation standard. While some abide by remediation procedures for Type One, Two, Three or Four levels of toxic mold incidents, others follow New York City or the protocol and procedures of the Environmental Protection Agency.

To remove particularly toxic mold from buildings, REC ensures that all its employees use full-face respirators and temporary decontamination showers. That is not a common practice in the industry. In fact, that level of protection exceeds the standards under New York City protocol. While many contractors take stringent precautions to remove toxic mold, others don’t. There’s a genuine concern that as the remediation industry grows, so will the numbers of fly-by-night contractors, untrained in proper mold remediation procedures.

Bremner says that is why it is essential that a standard set of guidelines for remediation work in the province be implemented. Those guidelines are something the Environmental Abatement Council of Ontario is working on with the province’s Ministry of Labour and Workers Safety Insurance Board.

One of the reasons it might be so difficult to get every consultant and contractor to agree to a common set of guidelines, is that not every person has the same symptoms from a given toxic mold species. I’ve talked to demolition contractors that suggest even that dark scary stuff—stachybotrys chartarum—has had little impact on their health. That may be the case now, but with increased exposure, are those contractors’ immune systems weakening? Research scientists and environmental consultants theorize that could be the case.

While mold is most often associated with older buildings or ones designed with sealed envelopes, Bremner points out that even in new construction, if materials are exposed to rain, snow, ice or other moisture sources, they could be the source of a future mold problem. “I think the whole construction building industry has to be properly trained on this subject,” Bremner says.

In order to get government funding for training, ISCA’s Laird knows he has to reach consensus with leaders from several unions, contractors’ associations and a swath of other groups. Just getting them into a common arena is one thing. Having them agree to a common book of guidelines for remediation will be another.

About the Author
Don Procter is a free-lance writer in Ontario, Canada.