

STAYING SAFE | MOLD AND MILDEW

CHECK, CLEAN ANY MOIST AREAS

By ANN S. KIM
STAFF WRITER

said, so a brand-new home could have a potential problem developing within its walls.

Most at risk

The very young, the elderly and those with weak immune systems will be most susceptible to the problems associated with mold.

Some conditions will make people sensitive to even low levels of mold, said David Lipton, an industrial hygiene specialist with the N.C. Division of Epidemiology. That includes people who have transplants, are undergoing chemotherapy or suffer from diabetes or from an array of other conditions, he says.

The potentially toxic "black mold," *Stachybotrys chartarum* can be lethal to animals that ingest it, but it isn't clear how it affects people who inhale it.

With homes, mold can inflict visible damage. If not kept in check, it can stain wood and walls and turn into rot.

"We've seen pretty much every situation when it comes to mold," Valerie Brown of Indoor Environmental Systems in Raleigh said. "We have a customer right now, she has a terrible mold problem in her crawl space, her floor is ready to fall in. Mold is like a termite, it eats through your walls and your floors. It seeps through."

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Some simple steps may spare your home from the kind of mold infestation that has plagued N.C. Central University.

While mold probably won't leave you with the \$9 million cleaning bill that the university now faces, it can cause a host of troubles ranging from allergy-like symptoms to structural damage to your home.

Even a little bit of mold is a sign that there's a problem with moisture in your home, said John Bower, author of "The Healthy House."

That moisture could be caused by a drippy pipe or a leaky roof. But some problems may lurk in less visible spots, such as wall cavities, ducts or crawl spaces. Bower says you can often count on your nose — or a friend's — to tip you off.

A musty smell is a sign that something is awry. You might be more attuned to the smell after spending some time away. And someone who does not live there — and therefore has not grown used to the smell — may also be off.

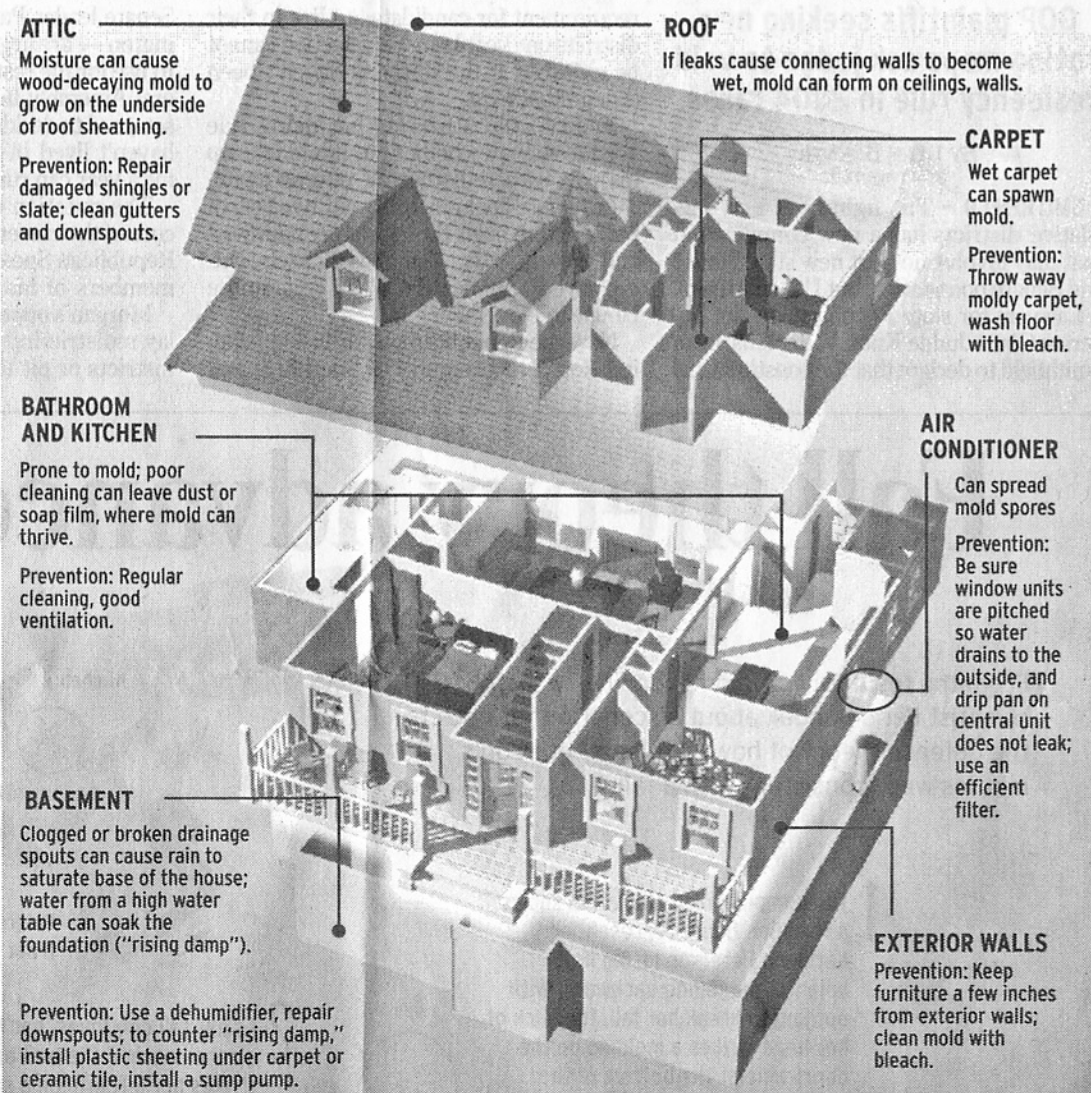
"If it's in, say, a wall cavity where the insulation is, most houses are not built tight enough that it's not going to stay there," Bower said. "Air movement can bring the mold spores inside."

As NCCU officials can attest, even new buildings are not immune.

Building codes might not address moisture issues, Bower

DEALING WITH MOLD

The basic way to prevent mold from damaging your home is to reduce moisture and humidity.



Sources: The Healthy House Institute, "My House Is Killing Me," by Jeffrey May, Johns Hopkins University Press