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MOLD: New Dimension to an Old Problem

by Albert Tyldesley, Chair ISI Safety Committee

It is with a sense of regret and perhaps anger that we acknowledge that air quality problems from carbon monoxide (CO) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2) continue to effect ice arenas. Recent air quality incidents in arenas in Pennsylvania and Georgia were reported in the press and investigated by OSHA. In both cases, public statements by arena personnel and customers affected by the air demonstrated a shocking lack of knowledge. After almost 10 years of concentrated instruction and education on how and why it is necessary to have an air quality maintenance program in every ice arena, we are still suffering from embarrassing incidents.

While our industry has unfinished business with CO and NO2, we must begin a new round of education with a different air quality problem – MOLD. Mold and the affect it has on our health is a major problem. Schools, office buildings and private homes have suffered mold conditions that required shutting the buildings down for very expensive, professional cleaning. Several private homes have been declared total losses due to mold and have been torn down. Some insurance policies specifically exclude mold damage from coverage.

The mold problem is a sleeping giant that is slowly receiving publicity. Your local newspaper and television stations have probably covered a mold story. Professional publications such as Indoor Environment report story after story on buildings plagued with mold. USA Weekend Magazine recently published a feature on "Mold's Untold Damage," and a Boston Globe story from September 2002 got our attention with the caption: "Mold Looms as Potential Hazard."

TV stations in several sections of the U.S. have done stories on how mold ruined the health and lifestyle of families followed by film of their house being destroyed because mold could not be removed. The public is becoming aware of the mold problem and sooner or later ice arenas will be identified as the perfect environment in which mold will and does grow.

The moisture, warm temperatures and organic materials needed to allow mold to grow are found in many areas of ice arenas. Locker rooms, snack bars and restrooms can and do support mold growth. Under rubber mats, behind walls and under appliances such as refrigerators and stoves are areas that allow mold to grow.

Highly supportive of mold growth is the area between the arena's roof and the insulation. This area in ice arenas is frequently damp and warm and has a supply of material for mold to grow on from natural products already in the ceiling to material found in water run-off from leaks in the roof. The areas around your players' benches, music booth and inside your dasher boards also provide the perfect environment for mold.

EPA guidelines suggest that mold should not be touched with bare hands; do not breath in mold; do not get mold spores in your eyes; and wear personal protection equipment including gloves, eye protection and a respirator when dealing with mold.