

Mold Remediation Report FAQ

Company information

What was the purpose of hiring external firms?

The University hired two firms to provide an independent external review of the mold remediation processes and current humidity control measures.

Why were these firms chosen?

During research of qualified firms and review of information in industry publications regarding mold growth in school environments, the University found a well-published company, Building Dynamics, LLC. (BDL). BDL is an independent engineering and industrial hygiene consulting firm specializing in HVAC systems, indoor environmental quality and energy analysis with documented experience related to mold growth in school environments.

In addition, Vertex Companies, Inc. is one of four consulting firms, under a multi-year contract with the University as an “on-call” resources to provide indoor environmental quality consultation and are selected by competitive procurement based upon technical qualifications.

What was each firm hired to do?

BDL’s charge was to determine a root cause of the mold development, identify why the mold showed so prevalently in Elkton Hall versus other high-rise buildings and to recommend changes, improvements or modifications to existing HVAC systems that might minimize or lessen the potential for mold growth.

Vertex and BDL were both tasked with reviewing current processes and procedures for mold remediation as compared to industry recommended practices. Each consultant was to provide real-time feedback to the Department of Residential Facilities if any corrections were needed.

In addition, Vertex provided an experienced environmental professional to perform visual inspections to verify the efficacy in each work area upon completion of the remediation and to document observations and findings, to include temperature and humidity.

Remediation Process

Why didn’t the air conditioning system address the level of humidity control necessary?

HVAC systems for buildings are designed for an average temperature and humidity for the region as defined by industry guidelines. The Elkton Hall system installed in 2011 was designed

to this standard. Until this year, minimal problems occurred. This year during late summer and early fall our region experienced extremely high temperatures and levels of rainfall resulting in sustained high levels of humidity. The extreme weather was outside of the range the HVAC systems in Elkton Hall were designed to dehumidify.

Is mold a hazard?

As stated in the Building Dynamics, LLC report, because the majority of building occupants are not affected by mold, it is not considered a health hazard. Mold growth should be eliminated following general precautions to protect occupants, but stringent hazardous materials procedures are generally not needed or recommended. Allegations that some molds are particularly toxic to occupants are not generally accepted by Public Health officials.

Was it safe for me to stay in my room that had mold?

According to federal health and safety agencies, mold growth is commonly found in both indoor and outdoor environments. Some people are sensitive to molds and may experience short-term reactions in the presence of mold growth. According to medical experts, symptoms associated with mold exposure are not unique and cannot be readily distinguished from symptoms caused by other medical conditions such as the common cold or seasonal environmental allergies. Since some individuals may have more intense reactions, individuals with medical conditions or who experience symptoms should consult with medical personnel regarding their risk to mold exposure. Arrangements were made for students who for medical reasons needed a new residence hall assignment.

Why did you open the residence halls if there was mold?

Mold is present in the indoor and outdoor air and on surfaces all around us each day. Mold levels were within acceptable levels as stated by the CDC and staff were responding to specific reported issues during the early fall. Residential Facilities staff addressed the mold incidents, most often reported on furniture, the fan coil units, and window frames, immediately. After seeing an increase in reports of mold in Elkton Hall, the university made the decision to relocate Elkton residents to nearby hotels, one-two floors at a time, while cleaning, remediation and inspection work was completed.

What did the mold remediation and cleaning companies do that Residential Facilities didn't do?

The external vendors were hired as a supplemental resource to University staff to assist in completing the overall remediation process as expeditiously as possible in order to minimize disruption for students who were relocated to area hotels. The inspection and cleaning process was conducted consistent with national guidelines by both internal and external parties.

Why didn't Vertex inspect the 6-8th floors?

Our internal inspectors reviewed and confirmed clearance for floors 6-8 while we were working to hire an external vendor to assist in the inspection process. Vertex was hired to offer additional

support to review remediation efforts and confirm rooms were ready for students to return to ensure the process was completed on schedule.

Root Cause

What did the external firm find caused the mold growth in Elkton Hall?

According to the external review by Building Dynamics, LLC, the mold growth was humidity-related. Indoor relative humidity was particularly elevated this past summer and early fall due to sustained hot/humid weather which was the wettest in recorded history. The air-conditioning system is designed to control for temperature more than humidity. Mold grows best in warm, damp, humid conditions and reproduces by spores. Spores can remain viable under harsh environmental conditions, including dry conditions, which normally do not support mold growth. The growth of mold in an indoor environment requires three basic elements: food, water, and climate. Buildings provide food sources (primarily wood and paper) for mold to grow. The key to controlling mold growth on materials in the indoor environment is moisture control. This includes maintaining moderate relative humidity levels indoors and responding promptly to water intrusion.

What is the University's approach to the recommendations and when and how will we know what actions will be taken?

We are currently reviewing engineering recommendations from the external engineering professionals to determine the best approach to addressing these issues moving forward. We will be enhancing dehumidification in Elkton and Denton halls this summer. Additional summer work will be determined over the next weeks. We will be sharing a comprehensive, multi-year strategy in late January.