

Climate Warming May Bring Ugly Surprises

Heat-trapping pollutants in the atmosphere are raising temperatures and humidity, increasing mold growth and fungal diseases in disasters' wake

By [Amy McVay Abbott](#) | July 14, 2025 | [Spending](#)

An EF-3 tornado — its rating means it had wind speeds estimated between 136 and 165 mph — barreled through the [St. Louis Metro area](#) in May, killing eight people, injuring 38 and destroying or damaging thousands of structures.



A house lies completely collapsed under a mountain of bricks, after a tornado struck in St. Louis, Missouri, May 16, 2025. | Credit: via PBS NewsHour

M. D. Walters returned home to the southern Illinois suburbs from a trip to learn of the storm that devastated the metro area and thought her home had been spared because there was no serious damage outside. However, she soon noticed an interior leak coming from her chimney and roof.

"So, I called a plasterer, and while stripping away the damaged area, he found a 12-inch watermelon-shaped black spot. [Mold](#). And it was spreading," she says. "I was able to find someone to do a remediation in short order, and the plasterer finished his project."

"People may go decades without knowing what is happening behind their dry wall."

Test results on the mold in Walters' house aren't fully in yet, but she knows mold isn't just irritating and unsightly; it can represent larger worries over health and home.

Mold, when outside, does a bang-up job of breaking down organic material, a natural process. However, in damp and humid conditions, mold

can cause respiratory problems and damage home infrastructure. A type of fungus, it is a microorganism that thrives on moisture, according to the [National Institute of Health](#).

Walters, who is prone to allergies, became concerned that other areas of her home might also have mold. She purchased a do-it-yourself testing kit.

"It was a little like being back in middle school science class," Walters said. "The kit came with 10 prepared Petri dishes, clear directions for how to collect samples, a picture guide to help you identify types of mold and mildew, and directions for eliminating mold if it is found."

Is Mold Getting Worse?

"It took three days for results to appear in the sealed Petri dishes," she added. "Of the three areas I tested, one showed signs of black mold. I treated the suspicious area myself and am rerunning the test to see if I was successful at eliminating it or it's a much bigger problem."

Scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology report that the [Earth has warmed 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit since 1850](#). With that warming comes increased humidity and rainfall, as well as extreme weather events that produce mold. The [climate is warming](#). We are getting rainier and wetter.

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Why the brouhaha? Most molds don't harm humans; in fact, we ingest mold in cheese or yogurt. We use them to make medicines, like penicillin. Yet certain [kinds of mold fungus](#) can bring on blurred vision, chronic cough, eye irritation, headache, nasal and sinus congestion, skin rash and sore throat. Mold can [exacerbate asthma and other lung diseases](#), and may be related to some cancers, cognitive issues, immune diseases and mental health issues.

Vigilance at Home

A 2024 study published in the [Archives of Clinical Toxicology](#) concludes that, "We now have evidence that climate change is raising both the Earth's temperature and humidity, resulting in increased mold growth, sporulation, and fungal diseases." The paper noted that "a rise in mold-infested buildings is expected, which in turn will increase the number of patients with severe mold-and biotoxin-related diseases needing better health management."

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To keep mold from attacking the self or structure, one needs the proverbial ounce of prevention.

Older homeowners in transition, whether downsizing or moving to a one-level domicile, should be vigilant about the tricks that mold can play on their old or newly purchased home.

Purdue University professor William Travis Horton, who studies mold in structures, recommends that homeowners check regularly for mold.

"Anytime a place starts to smell musty is an indication that you have some kind of growth," he advised. "Identifying and eliminating is one of the easiest indicators other than seeing nasty things growing on walls."

Call for Professional Help

Horton cautioned homeowners to look for a leak after inclement weather, as Walters did in her home.

"If you see a significant spot of mold, it's time to call a professional," Horton said. While he did not discount the do-it-yourself kits for small spots, he said that the discovery of a large mold colony or more than one colony means "it's time to have a fairly exhaustive examination of your structure."

"Any place moist can have mold, like laundry rooms, basements or crawlspaces," he said. Mold in basements and foundations can be particularly challenging to remediate.

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"Whenever there is a house fire or flood, anything that can introduce moisture into the space is a potential problem," Horton said, explaining that a home has many surfaces that suck moisture up, such as drywall and even some wood.

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He added that once the surface soaks up the moisture, drying it out takes a considerable amount of time.

Excessive water can equal mold growth.

Horton discussed the secondary impact of Canadian and California fires. Water used to extinguish wildfires often finds its way inside

structures. "Homes need to be gutted, all the drywall removed, as well as the insulation and the subfloors, after they have been water-soaked," he said. "The homeowner may have to go back to bare bones and redo the entire home."

Insight from an Expert

Horton offered several suggestions for homeowners.

- Install high-efficiency windows. Low-efficiency windows tend to have moisture condense on sills and windowpanes.
- Ensure you have a vapor barrier if you have concrete, as that building material absorbs moisture.

- Maintain good indoor air quality by using ample ventilation to bring in a lot of outdoor air. Bathrooms, laundry rooms and basements need attention because they often are wet and poorly ventilated.
- When buying a new home, consider checking the ventilation and moisture potential.

"We're building homes airtight now, because a huge portion of air conditioning and heating bills can be due to leakage," Horton explained. "We are doing a good job of sealing our homes, but that also means we are sealing moisture within. In some ways, slightly older homes have an advantage."

Homeowners can both draw in outdoor air and be energy efficient by using an [Energy Recovery Ventilator](#), he said. ERVs exchange outside air with indoor air, whether it is humid or chilled, and provides ventilation to the home.

Use Your Sense and Senses

He emphasized when potential renters or homebuyers first step into a new place, if they notice a musty odor, take heed. This warning may indicate the presence of mold. Have an inspector thoroughly check the HVAC system, as well as other areas in the home where moisture can accumulate.

"Water is one of the most destructive things, rotting a structure from the inside out," said Horton. "People may go decades without knowing what is happening behind their drywall."



Amy McVay Abbott is a retired health care executive who writes about health and aging, caregiving, disability, and occasionally the arts and history. She formerly wrote "A Healthy Way," syndicated by Senior Wire News Service. [Read More](#)

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