

Legislation on toxic mold considered
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New legislation being discussed in Lansing ultimately could set standards for toxic mold that don't exist anywhere in the country.

There are no state or federal standards on which molds - or how many mold spores - are dangerous. House Bills 6177 through 6179 could change that. One bill of the three-bill package would require the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) to establish a task force of experts to set standards.

For one, House Minority Leader Buzz Thomas, D-Detroit, introduced a bill that would require the sellers of residential property and apartment buildings with up to four units to disclose information about toxic mold just like they do for asbestos and lead-based paint.

"There have been more and more reports over the last couple of years from people who have been getting sick from toxic mold," Mr. Thomas said.

Mold exposure has been associated with allergic reactions and respiratory distress. Mold is common in buildings and can travel quickly through vents, air conditioning and open doors. Mold comes in 20,000 strains.

Locally, where some homes have been demolished because of toxic mold infestations and the county is preparing to take routine air quality testing of some of its buildings, word that standards may be coming was greeted with some skepticism.

County Administrator Charles Londo, who Friday heard a report that the molds found inside the county-owned Stoner-Kemmerling building at 29 Washington St., are within acceptable levels, said standards would help, but he's curious how they'll be set.

"I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, really," he said. "What are these standards going to be based on? It's too subjective. Who's to say that a spore count of 50 is harmful to one person and not to 2,500 others."

There are pre-existing conditions that may determine the effects of mold on individuals. Some molds, like *Stachybotrys*, create mycotoxins that can be harmful to people with compromised immune systems.

"Everybody has different tolerances for everything," Mr. Londo said, adding that some people are more allergic to pet dander and carpet than others and the same could be true for any of the hundreds of species of molds.

"What's toxic?" Mr. Londo asked. "How do you define that? What does that mean? "

The package of bills, which will be considered by the House Aug. 13, when lawmakers reconvene to complete their unfinished work, won't just set standards for acceptable mold levels. They would also create a law forcing disclosure of mold in the sale of property.

Alan Haynes of Haynes Real Estate Inc. in Monroe said he anticipated the new legislation. In fact, at the firm's last office meeting, a home inspector versed in mold was brought in to discuss the issue.

"I think it's a good idea," Mr. Haynes said of the proposed legislation about mold. "I know it's a problem and we have to take the liability off the seller because they usually don't know that they have it. We have to protect the buyer and the Realtor, too, so I don't have a problem with it."

The proposal would require a separate mold disclosure statement besides the general disclosure statement required during a real estate transaction.

"For us, it's kind of more paperwork, but it's something that's good for everybody to know," said Mark H. Johnson, a Realtor affiliated with Haynes.

Under the proposal, a buyer would have 72 to 120 hours to back out of the deal if the disclosure statement affirms the presence of mold.

Mr. Johnson said standards for mold are a good idea, too. "There's mold everywhere, but there are a few limited kinds of toxic mold.

Still, Mr. Londo said he doubts that.

"It seems to me we're coming up with stuff. What's this going to solve? Everybody has a different sensitivity. What's next? Ragweed, pollen, the stuff blowing off the trees?"

(The AP contributed to this report.)