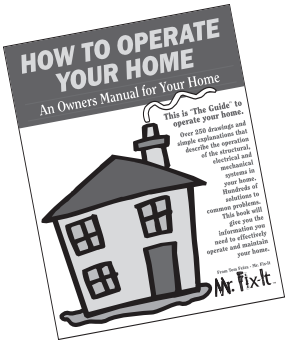


Mr. Fix-It HOME TIPS

Tom Feiza's Tips For Operating Your Home

MOLD AND MILDEW

Since about 1990, mold has become a serious concern for homeowners. The news media present graphic stories of sick homeowners and homes that must be torn down because of mold contamination. In recent years that message has been reinforced by more and more stories. Some people are even concerned with the small black dots that may appear from time to time in caulk around the bathtub.

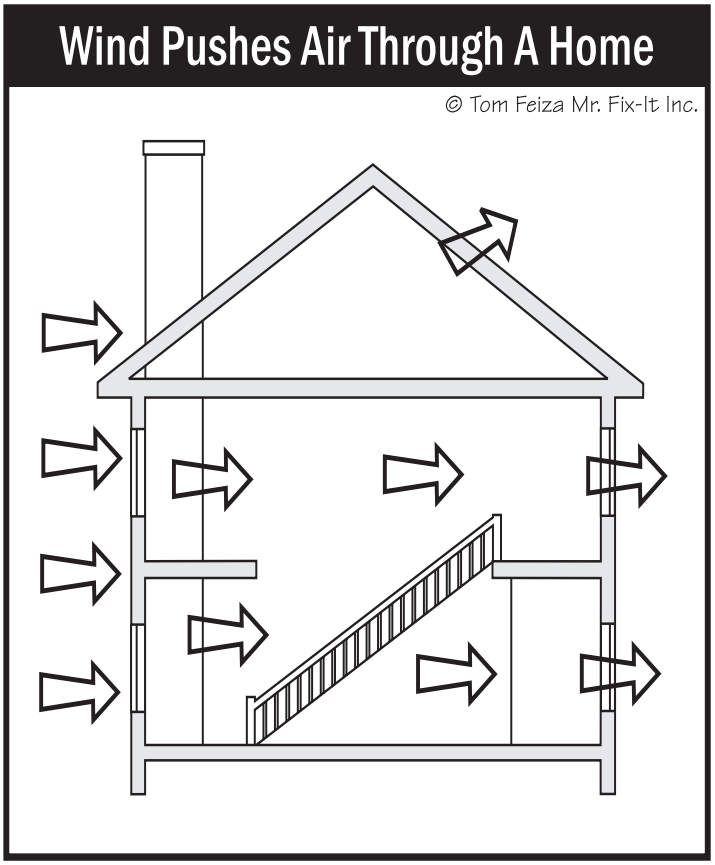
Is mold a real problem? Every homeowner needs to think through this issue relative to his or her own home. Mold has been around forever, but recently it has become a big issue. Why? Is it really an important issue?

Recent government and scientific studies have found that mold poses a threat to those who have breathing problems, allergies, or weakened immune systems. Government studies also show that mold does not normally affect healthy people.

We certainly don't want to be exposed to mold and risk our health. So, what do we do? Avoid the conditions that cause mold to grow: moisture, warmer temperatures, and a food source.

Mold is everywhere—inside and outside your home. Mold helps turn leaves and grass back into soil. The green growth on the north side of the tree trunk is—you guessed it—mold.

Wind Pushes Air Through A Home



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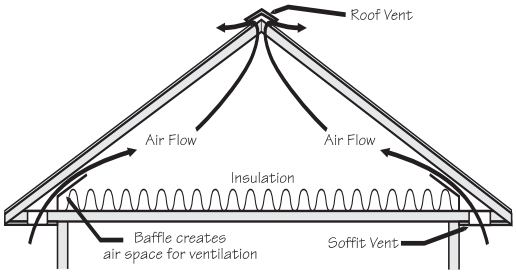
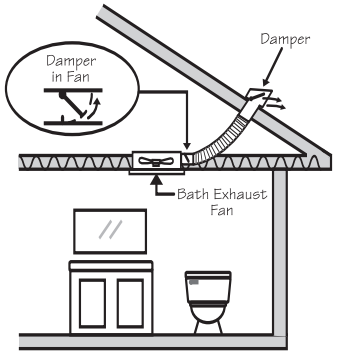
Ventilation - Two Basic Types

ATTIC VENTILATION



Removes heat and moisture from the attic space.

POINT (SOURCE) VENTILATION



Fan removes heat, contaminants, and moisture from point source to outside home.

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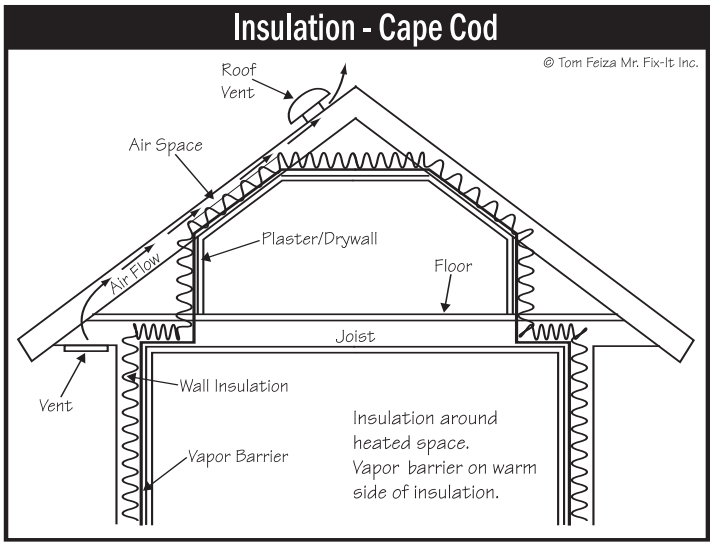

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What has changed? Why is it a problem now?

Older homes are big energy wasters. Air and heat move easily though old homes. Air movement and heat easily dry out old homes if they become wet. (Want to dry your hair? Blow hot air on it.)

Newer homes are tight—wrapped in air barriers and moisture retarders with tight insulation. We have stopped the air movement and heat loss, but now these homes don't dry out. If new homes get wet and don't dry out, there is the potential for mold.

Our first defense

Our first defense is to keep our homes dry. Without moisture, mold will not grow. This means we can't allow excessive condensation, roof leaks, or plumbing leaks; and if surfaces do get wet, we need to dry them as soon as possible. If soft materials become wet, they should be removed.

What to do if you suspect you have mold

Look for visible mold growth. Search for areas with a noticeable mold odor. Look for signs of water stains, leaks, standing water, or condensation. Eliminate the water and stop the mold. Most government agencies don't recommend more extensive testing because a simple visual inspection can confirm whether there is a mold or moisture problem. There are no accepted standards for testing and exposure levels for mold. There are no standards relating health issues to levels of exposure. Your best bet is to find the moisture problem, eliminate the moisture, and clean up any mold.

Mold Information – Resources

For good information on investigation, testing, and mold removal, I suggest the following resources:

Minnesota Department of Health

www.health.state.mn.us

Building Science Corporation

www.buildingscience.com

The New York City Health Department

www.ci.nyc.ny.us

Forest Products Laboratory

www.fpl.fs.fed.us

Environmental Protection Agency

www.epa.gov

State of Wisconsin Mold Information

http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/eh/HlthHaz/fs/moldindx.htm

Department of Health and Family Services – Mold Information

www.dhfs.wisconsin.gov/eh/HlthHaz/fs/moldindx.htm