

Cleaning & Restoration™

\$9.00

January 2011 • Vol. 48 No. 1

Published by the Restoration Industry Association

Contractor or Consultant? The Ethical Dilemma

Inside:

**Ordinary vs.
Extraordinary
Companies**

**Gymnasium
Floor Restoration**

By Michael A. Pinto, CSP, CMP

An Environmental “Mash-Up” – Part 2

Last issue I explained that the term “mash-up” is used in music to describe when DJs blend parts of disparate songs to create something new from existing materials that do not seem to have many commonalities. With the surge in environmental information available to cleaning and restoration contractors in reports from academia, industry, and medicine, the news can be overwhelming. Using the DJ analogy, it starts to sound like noise instead of music if we are unable to discern the proper underlying connections. So, while this column covers a number of new and interesting topics, I call it a mash-up because when layered together, the data leads us to new ways of thinking about the cleaning and restoration industry.

The Threat Of Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria – Superbugs

Since the advent of modern antibiotics, doctors have documented mutations of microbiological organisms that caused drugs designed to kill them to become less and less effective. Now a new and potentially more significant threat is being discussed. Bacteria first detected in India not only have developed a resistance to specific antibiotics, but appear to have the ability to easily modify to become resistant to a wide range of drugs. The organism of concern was named New Delhimetallo-1 (NDM-1) based on where it was first isolated.

Initially NDM-1 was only a local menace. However, in less than three years it has spread across the globe due to the rapid movement of people long distances by air transport. The prevalence of this new bacteria in a number of countries is also the result of a growing phenomenon known as “medical holidays” — trips to foreign countries for medical

procedures that are not available at home or are substantially less expensive in a foreign country.

The NDM-1 has already been verified in Britain, Canada, and the United States. So what does this have to do with cleaning and restoration professionals? In previous issues I discussed cleaning techniques that have proven to be useful in containing the spread of the most common antibiotic resistant bacteria – *Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA).

The effectiveness of these techniques has been further verified by a recent study in Britain which showed that a 10 percent increase in the cleaning budget of hospitals directed towards cleaning for contamination control resulted in a sharp decrease in MRSA infections. The emergence of a new class of superbugs is going to further accelerate the demand for regular and specialized cleaning that can help control such deadly threats.

Mold Health Science Catches Up to Observations and Common Sense

The release last year of a report from the World Health Organization (WHO) entitled *WHO Guidelines for Indoor Air Quality: Dampness and Mould* provided sufficient epidemiological evidence to show that the occupants of damp or mouldy buildings, both houses and public buildings, are at increased risk of respiratory symptoms, respiratory infections, exacerbation of asthma, hypersensitivity pneumonitis, allergic alveolitis, chronic rhinosinusitis and allergic fungal sinusitis. In short, there is now much more solid scientific evidence confirming that moldy environments cause a range of symptoms that people have been complaining about for the past 15 years.

It is important for cleaning and restoration professionals to have this type of scientific support for their day-to-day observations. For example, our organization recently received a



telephone call from a woman who had lived through a significant mold contamination problem 10 years ago. In the year 2000, she was running a daycare out of her home when several of the children who she was caring for developed a wide variety of health problems over short period of time. One infant even had to be hospitalized because of his respiratory distress, and frequent bloody noses. At the time, even the attending physicians were reluctant to give credence to our contention that the illnesses were linked to the mold that had developed in the house due to ice dams on the roof.

Still, we were able to logically explain the connection between ice dams and water in the wall cavities leading to hidden mold and the deposition of spores which can trigger the reported symptoms. The remediation was extensive and expensive, but ultimately the house was fixed and the occupants return to good health.

Interestingly enough, the homeowner called for two reasons:

- 1) To thank us for helping them 10 years ago. She said they would never have made it through that situation without our help as no one else believed that the mold could cause the problems they were experiencing.
- 2) To say that they get calls all the time from people in places as far away as

California, who think they may have a mold problem. She wanted to make sure she was giving them accurate information about mold and make sure that it was alright to refer people to our company.

Cleaning and restoration professionals are on the front lines of a number of emerging industry trends including mold remediation, cleaning for health, and infection control. We have something important to bring to the table with our knowledge and experience even if science has not yet caught up with the daily anecdotal data. If what you are doing works and you are helping people, then have confidence in your own observations and professionalism.

Sometimes Even Professionals Are Not Professional

Professionalism is something that is acquired after a great deal of hard work and must be constantly maintained by thoughtful decisions. We cannot rely on our rank or longevity in the field to substitute for good judgment on projects to protect our workers and our customers.

Unfortunately, when individuals begin to think they know better than what their peers have determined to be appropriate in a particular field through the development of regulations or a standard of care, bad things can happen quickly. For example, in October 25, 2010, a newspaper report broke the story of Hannibal, Missouri Fire Chief Tim Carter. Carter retired from his department on December 31 as a condition of a settlement with the city concerning allegations of fraud, neglect, insubordination and other wrongdoings related to several firefighters' removal of asbestos building materials from Fire Department-owned buildings in January 2009. Carter is accused of endangering firefighters in his department by telling them to remove asbestos-containing materials from a TV studio that was donated to the Hannibal Fire Department in August 2008.

Chief Carter had been aware that the building contained asbestos materials, but he kept that information from others in the

department. An asbestos building inspector had alerted Carter that a July 30 inspection showed asbestos in six of 22 samples taken from the building. That didn't even include the pipe insulation, which was not tested until after it was discovered in the dumpster. Carter was advised that asbestos-containing materials should be removed only by trained professionals with the correct protective equipment. Instead, he had firefighters wearing dust masks and street clothes working in the building.

Be Careful Who You Listen To

In addition to ensuring integrity and professionalism in your own organizations, cleaning and restoration professionals also have to closely monitor their subcontractors. This is true even if partners working on a project are typically considered to be more professional than the contractors who are doing the actual remediation or restoration.

In another asbestos related case, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Justice Department recently announced that a federal jury in Utica, N.Y. has found Certified Environmental Services, Inc. (CES), two of its managers, and one of its employees guilty of Clean Air Act violations, committing mail fraud, and defrauding the United States.

The EPA press release stated that: "Falsifying asbestos reports and air quality data is a serious crime and undermines our nation's efforts to protect human health and the environment. Exposure to asbestos can be fatal and the conviction by a jury shows that the American people will not tolerate illegal activity that puts the public at risk of cancer or other serious respiratory diseases. Because of the dishonest and illegal practices of this company, many people were left unaware for years of their possible exposure to asbestos."

As alleged in the indictment, CES, its employees, and a supervisor from a former asbestos abatement company, Paragon Environmental Construction, conspired over the course of nearly a decade to falsify lab results used to prove that asbestos removal was done properly.

In numerous instances asbestos removal companies represented that homes, schools, and other buildings were free of asbestos contamination when asbestos debris remained behind. Owners of local homes and buildings were unaware that asbestos had been left behind from sloppy abatement work because air quality reports were falsified by CES. Due to the false lab reports, people who lived or worked in the buildings were potentially exposed to asbestos, putting them at risk for developing cancer. EPA investigators have notified affected building owners of the asbestos problem so proper cleanup can be conducted.

The conspiracy and substantive Clean Air Act false statement counts of the indictment each carry a maximum possible five-year term of incarceration and a fine of \$250,000. The mail fraud counts each carry a maximum possible 20-year term of incarceration and similar fines.

More to Come

There are so many interesting twists and turns in the environmental portion of the cleaning and restoration industry that I will finish this Environmental Mash-Up next issue with a discussion of crazy regulatory decisions, fake risk assessments regarding contaminants in ceramic tile, the growing awareness of high levels of mercury in gym floor finishes, and consultants who look silly when they use terms they do not understand. ■

Michael Pinto, CSP, CMP, is the CEO of Wonder Makers Environmental, Inc. He has over 30 years of safety and environmental experience from jobs in the private sector, the non-profit arena and regulatory agencies. Wonder Makers specializes in identifying microscopic contamination in buildings such as mold, VOCs, infectious agents, asbestos and lead. Pinto is the author of five textbooks and over 150 published articles, and can be reached at map@wondermakers.com.