

\$9.00

Cleaning & Restoration

June 2012 • Vol. 49 No. 5

Published by the Restoration Industry Association

Phoenix Award for Innovation in Reconstruction: **Silver Lining**



ALSO

SAVING HISTORY

THE VALUE OF YOUR WORK

OF CONTRACTORS AND
CONSULTANTS

5 QUESTIONS WITH SAMUEL
BERGMAN, CR

By Michael A. Pinto, CSP, CMP

Of Mice and Men, or Of Consultants and Contractors

The best-laid schemes of mice and men / Often go awry.
(*To A Mouse* by Robert Burns)



In a perfect world, the addition of a technical consultant to a water-loss or mold remediation project would benefit the contractor. An independent expert would conduct an inspection, identify the root causes of the problem, specify the extent of the contamination, detail the engineering controls necessary for the project and spell out the criteria to be used to evaluate the success of the project. Within these parameters, they would allow the contractor to select the most efficient remediation methods and work processes.

This is exactly the process laid out in the regulations enforced by the State of Texas for mold remediation projects. Sadly, it is the rare exception to how consultants work on projects involving mold remediation and decontamination of other hazardous substances. Over and over, I have read inspection reports and work plans that state, “remove all fungal contamination” or “remediate all impacted areas until contaminants have been reduced to an acceptable level.”

Consultants Lack Training, Try to Shift Liability

Why would a consultant conduct an investigation and then not specify the location and quantity of the materials that need to be removed? It is not unusual for contractors who have completed a mold remediation technician course to be much more knowledgeable regarding fungal contamination than the consultants who are supposed to oversee their work.

Another problem is the attempt to shift liability. Some consultants believe that if they are vague in their inspection reports and work plans, they transfer liability for poorly completed projects to the contractor. They do not understand that a poor inspection report or ambiguous work plan actually increases their risk. This problem is magnified when the consultant does not understand or accommodate the three facets of the remediation project: source removal, cleaning of the transport system (generally the

HVAC system), and decontamination of reservoirs (known in the IICRC S520 standard as condition 2 spore deposition).

Know Your Endpoint Before You Begin

The most frequent consultant-set trap that contractors fall into is starting a project before they know how the assignment will be evaluated. We have recently been working with a restoration contractor hired to clean up tear gas residue. The consultant evaluating the work was not familiar with that contaminant and collected samples in a manner similar to what is used for post-remediation of illicit drug labs. The contractor was stunned when the surfaces that he had meticulously cleaned and coated showed up positive for tear gas residue.

When reviewing the sample results, I learned that the samples had been collected on wipes saturated with methanol. This sampling process uses a form of wood alcohol to draw chemicals through the paint film.

I suggested resampling with de-ionized water wipes, which more accurately represents normal cleaning techniques. The new samples showed no contamination. In that case, a consultant working in an area in which he admitted he had no expertise caused considerable grief for a contractor.

It is not enough to know that a consultant is going to “take samples at the end.” At the start of the project, the contractor needs to ask:

1. What type of samples will be collected?
2. How will the samples be collected?
3. What analysis will be performed on the samples?
4. Who will collect the samples and what training they have?
5. How will the results be interpreted?

Contractors should be very suspicious if, in response to questions about sample interpretation, the consultant explains that he or she has “been doing this for 20 years.” Post-remediation sampling interpretation needs to be objective. Everyone (including the



contractor, building owner, insurance adjuster and consultant) should know the measurement to which the sample results will be compared to determine completion.

Sampling With a Negative Air Machine Running

An important part to the “knowing the endpoint” trap is the ongoing debate in parts of the country about running a negative air machine when final clearance samples are collected for mold remediation projects. It is astonishing to me that so many consultants demand that all negative air machines be turned off for some period of time before post-remediation samples are collected. This makes no sense!

The negative pressure enclosure is designed to prevent cross-contamination from the work area to other areas of the structure. Until post-remediation samples are collected and analyzed, the contractor does not know whether the work area is free of all contamination. Yet despite the risk of cross-contamination, some consultants are ordering that the primary safety device for the project be shut off prior to knowing that the work was completed properly. This is tantamount to wearing your seatbelt during a cross-country trip and then taking it off two miles from your house, even though years of safety data show that most accidents occur close to home.

I have questioned consultants about this for years, searched available literature, and found no credible explanation for this demand other than “this is how everyone does it.” No other industry dealing with hazardous materials—radiation, asbestos, lead or chemicals—shuts off negative air machines until after sample results show the area is clean. If there were any scientific rationale for this approach, a study somewhere would detail the benefits and explain the process. Also, it would be consistent. Consultants insist that the negative air machines be shut off for four hours, eight hours, 24 hours, 48 hours, overnight, or whatever time period is convenient.

Consultants Cross-Contaminating Work Areas

Many restoration work areas have signs warning that biological contamination is present. The contractor requires anyone entering the work zone to wear appropriate personal protective equipment. Yet, consultants routinely enter without protective suits or respirators. This is bad for a number of reasons.

Consultants who enter active work zones must eventually leave the enclosure. Without a protective suit to leave in the decontamination chamber, they are walking contamination machines. When it comes time for final clearance samples, the lack of protective equipment creates an opposite problem. At that point, the full-body covering protects the cleaned work zone from outdoor spores. Many a project has failed because of cross-contamination brought in by the consultant on street clothes or from sampling pumps that were not properly decontaminated between jobs.

A Cooperative Approach

Contractors and consultants can work together. Indeed, projects on which their strengths are matched provide the best value for the client. On the other hand, when contractors are saddled with ill-trained consultants who are primarily concerned with liability control, projects can quickly go awry. When that happens, the contractor cannot be expected to take responsibility for the consultant's decisions. Rather, the contractor is generally forced to go on a “mouse hunt” to identify the best-laid schemes. **RIA**

Michael A. Pinto, CSP, CMP, is the CEO of Wonder Makers Environmental, Inc. He has more than 30 years of safety and environmental experience from jobs in the private sector, the nonprofit arena and regulatory agencies. Pinto is the author of five textbooks and more than 150 published articles. He can be reached at map@wondermakers.com.

AMC ELITE

Large Loss Drying Support
www.LargeLossDrying.com



We can:

- Deliver equipment only, or
- Deliver and setup equipment only, or
- Deliver and setup equipment with monitoring and documentation

Patrick Dowling* 800-480-3409 PDLargeLoss@gmail.com

Brennen Bryarly 877-264-2113 BBLargeLoss@gmail.com

*RIA Member since 1996 CR #354, WLS #28

“Same Day Delivery and Setup Anywhere in the United States”