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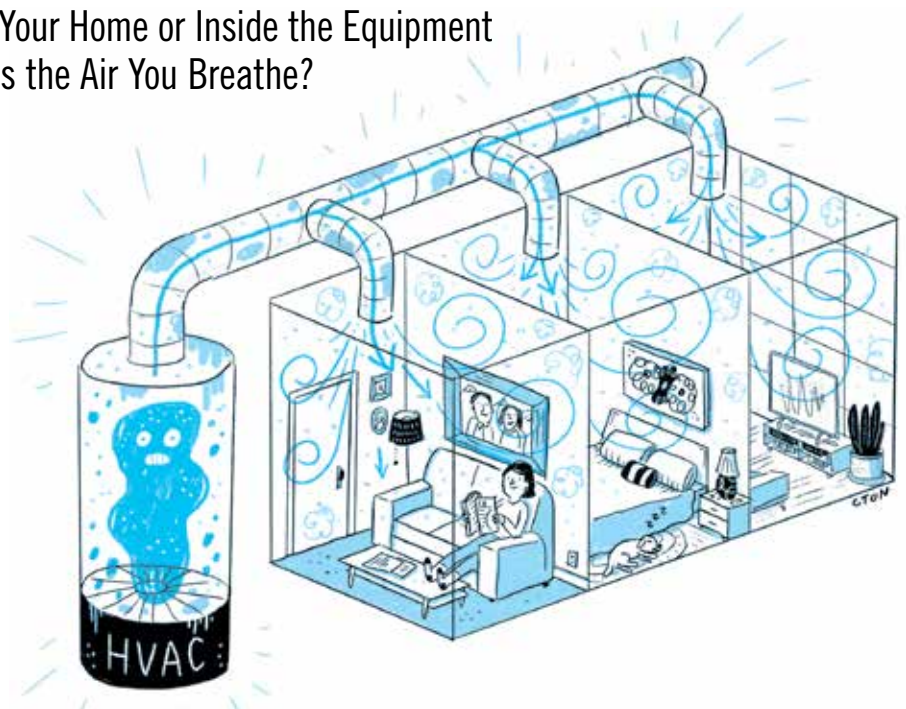
Mouldy Mysteries

I Found Mould, What Now?

What to do if You Find Mould In Your Home or Inside the Equipment That Heats, Cools, and Ventilates the Air You Breathe?

We have all seen the tell-tale black spots on a wet towel not properly hung to dry or on a piece of cheese left in the fridge too long. We throw them away and go about our daily business picking up new cheese at the grocery store and new towels for beach season, but what would you do if you found mould growing inside the walls of your home or inside the equipment that heats, cools, and ventilates the air you breathe?

A condominium consists of hundreds of components that function hand in hand to create a comfortable living environment for your residents. Comfort meaning many things but above all, safety. No one wants to live somewhere that feels unsafe. Do residents know there's mould? Like a house, there are various parts of a suite that can create a breeding ground for mould. A fan coil is one of the only pieces of equipment in a residential high-rise building that's in constant operation. Because the cabinets that house fan coils (behind the access panel door) are dark, warm, moist from condensation or leaks, and relatively unbothered, mould can easily start growing within the tightly woven insulation fibers. Moisture combined with temperatures below 40 degrees Fahrenheit, poor maintenance, and equipment over 20 years is the perfect combination for mould to start growing, multiply quickly, and potentially enter the ventilation system when agitated by



airflow, especially if insulation is showing signs of deterioration.

Repeated exposure to mould found in aging fan coils can potentially cause serious health concerns in residents and employees. Symptoms of repeated exposure can include chronic cough, headaches, congestion, sinus infections, and irritated eyes. If chronically exposed, these issues could lead to more serious health implications such as asthma. According to Professor Dean Befus, Alberta Respiratory Centre, University of Alberta, inhalation of mould can lead to an attack of asthma where the airways narrow and become blocked by mucus and other secretions. This can happen in two ways: firstly, the moulds

can stimulate allergic immune responses similar to cat dander or pollens, and upon re-exposure to the same mould, inflammatory chemicals produced in the airway cause an asthma attack. Secondly, in a person with preexisting asthma from other causes, the airways are hypersensitive or twitchy, and mould just like a strong perfume, smoke, or other air pollutants, can be a general irritant and cause an asthma attack.

Finding mould in the ventilation system of a building can be alarming for many reasons. First and foremost, the safety of your residents and employees. As a board, you and your property manager will want to address the concern before it becomes a

greater health and safety issue. As we saw in a past case – Ryan v. York Condominium Corporation 340, in 2016 the defendant was awarded approximately \$70,000 in damages because of the condo corporation failing to maintain and repair common elements within the building that caused significant water damage resulting in excessive mould growth in the resident's suite. Building managers and boards should be cognizant of and address mould concerns proactively to prevent liability.

Solutions

Every condo is different, as is each building's declaration, bylaws, and rules governing the maintenance, repairs, operations, and living conditions for its residents. While each building is free to govern based on its uniqueness it is in the best interest of safety that fan coil maintenance and repairs be managed centrally, regardless of ownership structure. In approximately 40 per cent of Ontario condominiums, the fan coils are a common element. In the remaining 60 per cent, they are owned by the unit owner. Luis Hernandez, Associate of Shibley Righton LLB suggests "in the event

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of mould being found in the fan coil units within suites and common areas, having one entity managing the maintenance and repairs practically makes the most sense to ensure the entire building is undertaking the necessary retrofits and mould remediation for the health and safety of all the residents".

A maintenance inspection by an experienced HVAC professional is the best next step to determine if mould exists. If found, and the unit is over 20 years, removal and replacement is the best course of action. This includes removal of all original components including fiberglass insulation, mould remediation, and cabinet disinfecting before installing the new retrofit unit.

Other options exist but with limited effectiveness because it is near impossible to access all corners of a fan coil cabinet without removing all the mechanical components. Full removal and replacement is the best assurance to providing building residents and employees a safe and comfortable living and working environment.

At a time where indoor air quality is of the utmost importance throughout a pandemic that directly affects the respiratory health of those who contract it, is now the time to ignore potential mould issues in your buildings? If you're concerned there's mould in your building, visit www.uniluxcrfc.com/indoor-air-quality/. **CV**

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