

Spore sport

By Eric Athas/ Daily News Correspondent

The mold spawned by the recent record rainfall that engulfed the region in May and June has the phone ringing off the hook at Gene Marckini's and Dr. Stuart Rhein's offices.

The 22.57-inch rainfall in Boston and the 13.55-inch accumulation in Worcester during the two months has given mold the ability to mushroom throughout homes and businesses, which has meant long hours for Marckini.

"I've never seen anything like this in my entire life, it's outrageous," said Marckini, president of Boston Environmental and Engineering Associates, a Waltham-based company that tests for mold in households and businesses in New England. "We've been putting in 18 hour days to deal with the recent problems."

In contrast to the recent rain, the monthly average for the Boston area is 6.46 inches, according to the National Weather Service.

Rhein, an allergist with a practice in Framingham, has seen a similar upsurge in business.

"Mold is a problem on a regular basis, but becomes worse when there is a lot of rain and flooding," said Rhein. "Its reactions can range from mildly annoying to life threatening."

The uprise of mold has sparked about a 15 percent to 20 percent increase in visits for Rhein, who said that in recent months more patients have complained of mold-related allergy symptoms.

Rhein said symptoms include itchy and watery eyes, difficulty with breathing and nasal problems. He said when a patient is experiencing symptoms, the source of the mildew, which tends to be a damp basement, a flooded workplace or a wet carpet, is the key to fixing the problem.

Marckini, meanwhile, said while mold spores have a natural presence in the air, water – like the recent deluges – causes them to multiply.

"The biggest problem with mold, is if you don't fix the water problem, the mold will come back," he said. "The first thing we tell people is to get the water problem fixed."

Robinson's Ace Hardware in Framingham is one source for mold relief, and sales of dehumidifiers are on the rise. Manager Anissa Giarla said the hardware store has sold more dehumidifiers the past two months than it did this time last year.

"It seems like there is an increase in the amount of people that are buying these products," said Giarla,

who also sells Damprid, a non-electronic dehumidifier, which uses calcium chloride crystals to remove moisture from the air.

But Rhein said dehumidifiers can do only so much, and that if the amount of mold has reached a certain point, professional mold removal is needed. He said when he knows where mold is building up, he gets a company to conduct tests in an effort to pinpoint the source.

Ace Hardware sells Pro-Lab mold test kits, which indicate the presence of mold in a span of 48 hours, and can give the exact count and type of mold growing.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Web site said mold, which "can cause allergy reactions, asthma episodes, infections and other respiratory problems," can be brought about by flooding or moist conditions, similar to the damages caused by recent rain.

The DPH site says that simple household cleaning supplies can be used for minor mold accumulation, but removal of wallpaper may be needed if mold arises in the wallpaper paste.

The site also states that mold can develop 24 to 48 hours after flooding and will

continue to grow until the water is dried out.

