

Mold is the source for many flu-like afflictions

BY DELTHIA RICKS, Newsday

Exposure to mold concentrated in a building can result in a diverse range of health effects that can include chronic cough, headaches and memory loss.

One of the most notorious offenders is a spore-producing black mold that can severely sicken people and pets and is one of the leading causes of the phenomenon known as sick building syndrome, in which occupants experience acute illness from contaminants.

"There are hundreds of different kinds of mold," said Bill Haile, director and chief executive of American Ecotech Corp., a Deer Park environmental testing and air purification company. On Long Island, many of the most common molds include *Penicillium*, *Aspergillus*, *Cladosporium* - and *Stachybotrys chartarum*, a pathogenic black mold that can force the closure of buildings and drive people from their homes. The latter, also known as toxic mold, produces spores called mycotoxins.

It has not yet been determined that toxic mold is the cause of respiratory problems in residents of a Westbury luxury apartment building.

Dr. Ken Steier, director of patient safety at Nassau University Medical Center, and a pulmonary dis-

ease specialist, said he has treated hundreds of patients throughout his career who have suffered respiratory problems as a direct result of exposure to molds of all kinds, including toxic mold.

In addition to respiratory problems, Steier cites hearing loss, dizziness, rashes, and excessive bruising and memory problems as some of the medical problems that have been attributed to exposure.

Toxic mold, he added, is the most sinister because it is capable of inhibiting DNA and protein synthesis in mammalian cells, obstructing the function of normal body processes.

"The first step is to get rid of moisture," Steier said yesterday. "The best remedies are sunlight, ventilation and household cleansers, especially bleach."

But Haile begs to differ on the usefulness of bleach, which he said can be ineffective against toxic mold. "Bleach doesn't kill mold; it covers it up and it makes the mycoflora [spores] go airborne."

Haile blames Long Island's increasing problems with mold on dampness, especially in basements of older structures. But, he said, newer buildings are affected too because codes require them

to be airtight. As a result, moisture is trapped and mold grows.

Mold and dampness are factors in 21 percent of current asthma cases and cost the nation \$3.5 billion a year in health-care expenses, according to a study done by scientists at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

A paper published earlier this year by a scientist at the Berkeley lab found that mold and building dampness increased the risk of respiratory and asthma-related illnesses by 30 to 50 percent.

Staff writer Carl Macgowan contributed to this story.

In addition to respiratory problems, Steier cites hearing loss, dizziness, rashes, and excessive bruising and memory problems as some of the medical problems that have been attributed to exposure.

