

Selective Invasive Investigation

Sometimes when we are not sure how long the materials have been wet and we are trying to determine category of water, it might be good to perform Selective Invasive Investigation (SII) to look for indicators of how long materials have been in contact with water.

I call it “Selective” because we only want to open up the walls, ceilings, floors, or cabinets, if we absolutely have to during our initial investigation, but we certainly want to be thorough in our investigation, and if we think the affected materials may have been wet for more than 48 to 72 hours, we need to be sure we don’t have fungi growing behind or below affected materials. The key is obtaining photos of the wettest areas where mold would be most likely to grow to justify category 2 or 3.



Go to where it was the wettest, the longest on materials that are most likely to grow mold!

I would encourage everyone after confirming the origin of loss, if you are not certain if it is category 1, 2, or 3, to ask the lead tech to go to wherever there are wet materials that would most likely support and grow mold to perform a little invasive investigation to help us make that determination. For example, if it is a toilet supply line leak and we are not quite sure how long materials have been wet, ask the tech to go to where it has been the wettest the longest, which is probably behind the toilet, and take a close-up photo of that area, then pull off the baseboard and take a photo of the back of the base and surface of the drywall behind the base, and finally cut out a 2 ½” x 12” piece of drywall (below baseboard line) and take a photo of the back of the drywall paper that was inside the wall cavity. If there is not any visible potential microbial growth, then it is probably safe to leave the water loss classified as a category 2, if there are no musty odors or other indicators of filth or contamination. Generally, drywall paper (front and back) and the back of base trim are great materials to check for mold growth.

If the water loss originated under the kitchen sink, then have the technician take close-up photos in every affected cabinet and under the cabinet after pulling off the toe kick. Again, take photos of each step identifying exactly how much staining or mold there is on that surface. If the water traveled through the floor and went into the ceiling below, you may have to have the lead tech use their infrared camera and moisture meters to identify the wettest areas right under the origin of loss and cut open the ceiling (1' x 1' inspection port) to take readings, photos, and look for visible mold growth. Make sure to make the insured aware of our reasons for investigating before disturbing materials that will need to be replaced with new.

Finally, don't forget many structures with previous or ongoing moisture issues unrelated to this water loss might have visible microbial growth behind baseboards or under cabinets. You and the lead technician will have to work together to piece the puzzle together as you gather evidence (photos, photos, photos!). We need to ask lots of questions, like has there been any other water intrusions or wetting events in the past in those wet areas? When? Where? What was done to mitigate it? Is there normally high humidity in those areas? If we feel strongly the water loss is a clean water loss and we find visible potential microbial growth, we can be confident it is most likely preexisting, and we need to let the adjuster know. **Remember, it typically takes five to six days in optimum growing conditions for mold to become visible. So, if the mold originated from this water loss, most likely the materials have been wet for a week or longer, depending upon the amount of visible mold, and in that case, the water loss could be considered to be a category 3 water loss due to time.** Be thorough, be detailed, and gather facts and evidence by asking for good photos with clear descriptions. Also, be open-minded and "listen" to the technician since they are there and we are not. Ask for good photos to justify their recommendations that shows a significant health risk. Ask if they smell any moldy or musty odors. Remember, category 3 water is "grossly contaminated," and we need some proof of microorganism risk to human health to validate authorization of demolition. To find good proof, we might have to open things up a bit and take good photos.

The best thing a contractor can do to prevent future allegations that they caused mold is to take good photos with clear descriptions of all final moisture content readings proving they left the affected materials, that were saved, in pre-loss conditions that will not support mold growth from that water loss occurrence.

Happy Drying! Ed

For more EDucated articles, visit accuserve.com.



MEET ED

Instructor Ed Jones has more than 30 years of experience in the industry, has the title of Master Water Restorer, is an Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC)–approved instructor, and has served on the S500–2021 consensus body committee to develop the most recent standard.

