

Tech

# The Surprisingly Fierce Battle Over a Scientific Paper About Mold

By Ben Richmond

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Since 2005, Sharon Kramer has been fighting to have the dangers of mold recognized by the courts and medical community—and after decade, she's finally scored a victory.

The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine has taken down [a position statement](#) which claimed that otherwise healthy people cannot be adversely affected by inhaling indoor mold. Kramer and other mold activists, say the position has been used by insurance companies for more than a decade to deny workers' compensation claims.

**VIDEOS BY VICE**

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The ACOEM did not respond to a request for comment.

Kramer was once called the “mold queen” by LA Weekly for her crusade against the ACOEM paper. In 2008, Kramer was found guilty of libel against one of the study’s authors (although she claims the court documents were falsified to frame her) and in 2012 spent three days in jail over the matter. I asked her if the position statement’s removal felt like a victory.

“Yes. I’d have to say that this feels like a success to me,” she told me over email, writing that the decision should help save many lives now that the paper doesn’t have the legitimacy of the ACOEM behind it. “It’s proven [that] microbial toxins in water damaged buildings could never reach a level to harm.”

In 2002, insurers in the United States paid out \$2.5 billion in mold-related claims, before the ACOEM published its position. But according to Ritchie Shoemaker, a doctor who runs SurvivingMold.com, “after 2003, there were no cases that I participated in where defense did not quote ACOEM,” she told Work Comp Central.

If you're an insurance company, contractor or construction company, it makes sense that you would cite a document that concludes that, "except for persons with severely impaired immune systems, indoor mold is not a source of fungal infections."

"Current scientific evidence does not support the proposition that human health has been adversely affected by inhaled mycotoxins in home," the statement continues.

Kramer, however, isn't done fighting. In a March 1 entry on her blog, she wrote that, "merely sunseting the ACOEM Mold Position Statement does not rectify the diminished quality of life that is still occurring for many, and is resultant from the years of fraud in medical policy and courts over the mold issue."

"But it's only a partial victory as those who were involved in writing and protecting this false policy are still out there, lying about their roles in aiding to continue for so long," she told me.

While the ACOEM position statement didn't claim mold to be a source of fungal infections in people without compromised immune systems, it did advocate getting riding of mold—though, not exclusively for health reasons. "Mold growth in the home, school, or office environment should not be tolerated because mold physically destroys the building materials on which it grows," the paper read. "Mold growth is unsightly and may produce offensive odors, and mold is likely to sensitize and produce allergic responses in allergic individuals."

Scientific literature is clear that indoor mold has adverse health effects on those with asthma, and one in three people can have an allergic reaction to it.

"All molds have the potential to cause health effects," states the EPA's website. "Molds produce allergens, irritants, and in some cases, toxins that may cause reactions in humans. The types and severity of symptoms depend, in part, on the

types of mold present, the extent of an individual's exposure, the ages of the individuals, and their existing sensitivities or allergies.”

However, the EPA site also states that healthy individuals “are usually not vulnerable to opportunistic infections from airborne mold exposure.” Although some molds produce potent toxins under certain circumstances, and some have been found responsible for human health effects, “for many mycotoxins, little information is available, and in some cases research is ongoing,” the site states.

The Centers for Disease Control site states that, “there are very few reports that toxigenic molds found inside homes can cause unique or rare health conditions such as pulmonary hemorrhage or memory loss,” but adds, “these case reports are rare, and a causal link between the presence of the toxigenic mold and these conditions has not been proven.”

And while the CDC acknowledged that, in 2004, the Institute of Medicine “found there was sufficient evidence to link indoor exposure to mold with upper respiratory tract symptoms, cough, and wheeze in otherwise healthy people; with asthma symptoms in people with asthma; and with hypersensitivity pneumonitis in individuals susceptible to that immune-mediated condition,” it was only in the presence of one type of mold, *Stachybotrys chartarum* (*Stachybotrys atra*).

Although copies of the position paper still live on—for example, on the National Institutes of Health’s website—its official removal is still a big win. As Kramer writes on her blog, the statement now “carries no more weight when shaping policy and in court than any other medical journal publication.”

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