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Wednesday, October 16, 2002

Battle Creek burglary not the same mold story

By Trace Christenson
The Enquirer

A Battle Creek burglar may have carted away more than household items from a home this month.

The thief could have spread a strain of black mold that can cause illness to those who come in contact with it.

Battle Creek police reported a break-in at 997 Capital Ave. S.W. The burglary occurred sometime between Aug. 5 and Oct. 5.

Police said someone pulled off a board and entered the home, damaging the interior and taking several items -- all of which might have been infected with black mold spores.

The home, owned by Kevin Crinion, has been closed and boarded for nearly a year because of the mold, police said. He had to leave all his property behind.

Officer Doug Graham said he didn't inspect the interior of the house after the burglary report because of the mold, and was awaiting an inventory by Crinion, who had to wear a special, airtight suit before going inside.

Crinion could not be reached for comment.

To clean up black mold

- Identify and correct the moisture problem.
- Remove, bag and discard nonessential porous material that has been heavily contaminated. When removing drywall or sheetrock, cut at least 12 inches beyond the area of visible mold. Hard material such as glass, plastic or metal can be kept after cleaning and disinfecting.
- Use a nonammonia soap or detergent in hot water and scrub the affected area. Use a stiff brush or cleaning pad on block walls or uneven surfaces.
- Thoroughly rinse the area with hot water. A wet-dry vacuum is an easy way to pick up excess water.
- Disinfect the area with a diluted solution of 10 percent household bleach (do not mix with ammonia or other chemicals or use a greater concentration of bleach). Avoid runoff or standing liquid.
- Completely dry the area for two or three days, using a dehumidifier or raising the temperature if needed.
- Vacuum the home thoroughly, preferably with a HEPA or filtered vacuum.

The mold can cause respiratory problems, nasal and sinus congestion, burning, watery, red eyes, dry, hacking cough, sore throat, nose and throat irritation, shortness of breath, skin irritation, central nervous system problems, aches and pains and possible fever.

The thief could have spread the mold by entering the house and taking items out, said Ted Havens, director of the environmental health with the Calhoun County Health Department.

"If they didn't know what they were getting into and didn't have proper suits, they could be exposed to all that junk and might take it to their house," Havens said. "If the conditions are right, they moved the problem."

Havens said his department has not been involved with this house. He said mold can't be seen or smelled.

"But once you get it, it's difficult to get rid of if you don't get on top of it quickly," he said.

He said a bleach-and-soap solution is used to clean areas affected with mold, but he said if the thieves don't know that the house and contents were contaminated, they could spread it by keeping or distributing the items they took.

"If they went in and grabbed some stuff -- it could be a problem."

Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com

Source: Molds in Your Home, Michigan Department of Community Health