

## Battling the mold menace

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West Roxbury -

Mary Mulvey Jacobson used to get daily headaches from working at Boston's City Hall, and it wasn't because of her job. It was because *where* her job was situated. City Hall is a mold trap, and Jacobson knows it well.

Jacobson hasn't been back to City Hall since 2001, but when she is re-exposed to mold, she gets headaches, dizziness, rashes and will even have gynecological problems.

As a member of the Healthy Schools Task Force, which is run through the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health and the Boston Urban Asthma Coalition, Jacobson has launched an attack against mold.

Unfortunately, as Jacobson learned more about mold, she learned that many of the problems that people face from mold have nothing to do with mold. It's all about the medical community and the physicians who represent special interest groups who care more about money than how mold hurts people.

Jacobson's frustration only grew after she attended a Defense Subcommittee of Appropriations meeting last week in Washington, D.C., which focused on the Walter Reed VA Hospital problems.

In recent weeks, many media outlets have reported how the Walter Reed Hospital is not providing good health conditions to military personnel staying in the hospital.

"It was just unbelievable. It was just startling listening to the surgeon general [and a military general] passing the buck," said Jacobson, of West Roxbury, who is the president of the West Roxbury Business and Professional Association, "and that somehow this is OK that they have allowed these people [hurt soldiers] to be exposed to these contaminants. There's no one more susceptible to contaminants than someone who is sick or injured."

But passing the buck, or misrepresentation, is something Jacobson has seen throughout her fight against mold. Jacobson is also on a congressional task force regarding health issues of mold for John Conyers, D-Michigan.

"One of the main issues we've been working on is the medical issues and how doctors don't seem to recognize and diagnose mold-related health issues," said Jacobson. "A lot of these doctors are representing whoever hired them on behalf of special industries, not the health issues."

Jacobson commonly points to an American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine paper printed in 2002: "They made a concerted effort to not let doctors [who would disagree with their desired opinions] to review it, including the head of the VA hospital for environmental medicine, who is a member of the ACOEM."

"The other major reason we were in D.C. is because we wanted to go one step further and want a congressional investigation with the corruption on medical issues of mold exposure," she said.

Mold is commonly found in schools and causes asthma, chronic breathing problems, reactive airway diseases, memory loss and problems concentrating.

"I know this stuff is causing children problems on concentrating and remembering things," said Jacobson.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention came out a few months back to say that pregnant women should stay away from mold. The World Health Organization believes that mold can cause breast cancer, as well as many other gynecological problems.

Jacobson said she would like to see some standardization of cleaning up mold out of buildings because many cleaners do not know how to clean it properly and the mold just comes back.

The diagnosis of mold-related issues is also disheartening. Jacobson said doctors often don't know about mold-related health issues and often ask for psychiatric exams for their patients.

Jacobson said she hasn't visited any of the local VA hospitals, but said she would like to see what condition they are in.

"It's been hard under a Republican regime ... [We would want] FEMA-type funding to address problematic buildings and regiments to follow," said Jacobson. "It touches upon the insurance industry ... Especially in light of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, there are more and more federal officials interested in mold and what illnesses that it causes, and they are offering more help to people associated with these problems."

Jacobson said that Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., and U.S. Rep. Stephen Lynch, D-9th, have been very receptive to mold-related health issues and fixing the problems.

"It's bad, very bad, and it's not just Boston City Hall," said Jacobson. "It's many of our public buildings, not just in our state, it's throughout the country and the world. It's an international health hazard and it can manifest itself in many ways."

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How do we get rid of it?

*According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "it is impossible to get rid of all mold and mold spores indoors; some mold spores will be found floating through the air and in house dust. The mold spores will not grow if moisture is not present. Indoor mold growth can and should be prevented or controlled by controlling moisture indoors. If there is mold growth in your home, you must clean up the mold and fix the water problem. If you clean up the mold, but don't fix the water problem, then, most likely, the mold problem will come back."*

*For more information, check [www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html](http://www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html) to learn about combating mold.*