

My Story: Sharon Malone

In the summer of 2001, my life changed forever. I was working at College of the Mainland in Texas City, Texas. My work area, in the math wing of Technical vocational building, was flooded with water from a broken pipe. Although the pipe was not in my area, it flooded at least 12 rooms, including my office. To save money, housekeeping (rather than a remediation company) was called in to pick up the water and then later shampooed the carpet. This was done without moving any of the furniture. Because the carpet was not removed from the floor and wet sheetrock and wallpaper remained on the walls, the area smelled horrible.

In the fall of 2001, I started having sinus and ear infections. In January, 2002, I went to ENT Specialists. It took several visits, as well as tubes in my right ear, to clear up the infection.

February 2003: I started having problems with my skin. It looks like ringworm--up and down my arms, on my face, and on my chest. I saw a Dermatologist who could not tell me what the problem was.

February 2003: My coworkers and I complained to administration about the conditions in the area. After the President of the college and Vice president toured the affect area, they agreed to replace the carpet, but they didn't remove the water-damaged sheetrock or wallpaper. So, I continued have skin and sinus problems.

EVERY NIGHT THE A/C WAS TURNED OFF TO SAVE MONEY, WHICH MADE IT HORRIBLE THE NEXT DAY BECAUSE OF NO VENTILATION AND ALL THAT MOLD.

April 27, 2004: I started having breathing problems.

June 2004: I asked Maintenance to provide an air purifier and clean the a/c vents, but no action was taken.

September 2004: I went to see a pulmonary specialist. Because they treated the symptoms but not the problem, I did not get better.

In the summer of 2005, the maintenance director did major renovation on the a/c. This work was done with employees working and students studying in the building. No consideration was given to the employees or students. The area was not closed to do the work.

[Before the renovation, the air used to cool our work area was pulled from between the two floors, chilled, and then dumped into the work environment.]

In February 2007, I went to an Allergist. This was the first Doctor to recognize it was a fungal infection. Allergy tests (96 needle sticks on my arms and back) were done. After completing the tests, the allergy doctor recommended allergy shots every week for up to 3 to 5 years with no guarantee of success. I decided to take more time to think about it and continued with the medications she gave me.

August 2007: There was another water leak. This time, it was in my work area. It was a sewer line. The back of the wall and the floor were wet. There was no proper clean up. The leak was stopped, but the floor was left with a hole for 4 weeks before filling it in.

In August, I was assigned a new supervisor. I asked for her help to get the area cleaned up. She and the Chairperson of Development Math toured the area. She told me she became sick from being in the area.

My health problems continued to get worse. I went to see my doctor. I asked her if she could help me by adding her voice to the mold situation in an effort to get them to clean the area. She sent the college a letter dated August 27, 2007. I gave the letter to HR. No action was taken.

I continued to feel very ill, but I was still working. Finally, my body said I had enough. On October 10, my breathing got so bad that I left work and went home. My husband took me to the emergency room. I was treated and referred back to my doctor. I gave a copy of the ER report to the college the next day.

I saw the Allergy doctor on October 16. My medical symptoms were: headaches, twitching muscles, joint, back and muscle pain, rash on neck and both arms, severe fatigue, shortness of breath and chest tightness, problems with thinking and memory, allergies, trouble sleeping, and digestive problems. The doctor took me off work for one month. I took a second letter from the doctor concerning the mold and my health.

I was upset because of the lack of concern by the administration, so I went to my Union. The Union put pressure on the college to have the area tested. The area was tested, and the tests showed high counts of various molds including Cladosporium, Penicillium, Aspergillus, Chaetomium and Stachybotrys.

I lost confidence in the Allergy doctor, because she was just treating the symptoms and not the problem, and I was not getting better. So, I went to see Dr. Andrew Campbell, at Medical Center for Immune and Toxic Disorders. I took the mold report from the college and my medical records. After testing, I learned I was suffering from Mycotoxicosis, Aspergillosis, Candida, Hypersensitivity Pneumonitis, Opportunistic mycosis, histoplasmosis, and blastomycosis.

After enduring all of these health problems from the summer of 2001 to December 27, 2007, I finally learned what I had.

Due to the fact the college was closed for the holidays, I went to see my supervisor on January 9, 2008. We reviewed my medical tests, along with the mold report from the mold remediation company that tested the work area. She typed and signed a memo that documented that we had this meeting, and she gave me a copy. On January 18, 2008, I went to speak with the President of the college. We reviewed my medical report and the mold report. I later emailed him to learn what progress has been made, but I received no response.

I applied for my short-term and long-term disability. After several denials, my disability was finally awarded. The stress of dealing with insurance companies was unbelievable. They have

no problem getting your money, but they make you beg for your benefits. To get full benefits, I also had to apply for social security benefits.

In March, I hired a lawyer to help me get the benefits I felt I was due. We were not a good match, because he was not working for me. The stress of my illness, dealing with denials, from the insurance company and social security, and non-action from the attorney, left me worn out.

In January 2008, I started IV treatment through a midline in my right arm which later was changed to a sub-clavian port placed in July in my upper right chest. I also received weekly in-home nursing care for dressing changes and port care. From January 2008 to February 2010, I did daily IV antifungal treatments to kill the mold in my system. I am left with multiple health problems that will be with me the rest of my life. I can never go back to being what I was before the exposure. My lungs were damaged because of the mold. I still have problems with headaches, twitching muscles, joint and muscle pain, neck and both arms scarred from mold, severe fatigue, shortness of breath, pleurisy, chest tightness, problems with thinking and memory, allergies, trouble sleeping and digestive problems.

Because I was required by the insurance company to file for social security in order to receive full insurance benefits, I continued to apply until they finally awarded me Medicare on April 1, 2010.

My last challenge is working to receive my worker's compensation benefits. I am dealing with the denials, but I will not give up. I was injured on that job, and they should step up and take ownership of the problem. I will give continue to provide updates as I work through this issue.

I never thought I would be in this situation. When toxic mold entered my life, my whole world changed. It changed my family life, my career, my active lifestyle and my health.

Toxic mold controls every aspect of my life. It dictates where I go, when I go, and how long I stay. It dictates what I do, because I don't always have the energy to do what I would like. If I overdo, it take several days to recover. If the weather is not good, I am confined to my home because of breathing problems. This illness owns me, and I hate it. This system, with its laws, regulation and rules, victimizes mold-injured people every day. It fails to protect the public, and often we become just the cost of doing business.

My plan is to look to the future and do what I can to help others. I just hope my voice will be loud enough to penetrate all the false information that keeps mold victims, **victims**, and not survivors.

Sharon Malone
Texas