August 1, 1988
Vol. 174, No. 14, Serial No. 3095

For allergy relief

Contractor combats a moldy problem

by Greg Kowalski

Since 1926

HOUSTON - Mold.

Most of us think of it as the stuff that turns a forgotten loaf of bread a delicate shade of fuzzy green.

Sandy Reifler sees mold as a health hazard. For the past eight years, he has concentrated on battling mold and other air contaminants in air conditioning systems.

"My business primarily deals with allergy patients. I try to prevent things from growing in their air conditioning systems by filtering

IMPACT REPORT

particles out before they get in," says Reifler, owner of Air Cleaners for Allergy Problems, a one-man business based in Southwest Houston.

At the core of Reifler's operation is the "Dust Eater" electrostatic air cleaner, an outgrowth of a filter he developed in 1980.

The Dust Eater is a deceptively simple device. It looks like an ordinary air filter but its interior is made up of layers of "Dacron" polyester material that creates a natural electrostatic charge. Particles passing through the material are attracted to the fibers where they build up and fall to a collection place for easy removal.

The principle is much like an electronic air cleaner, but Reifler's filter costs about one-tenth as much and can be installed as quickly as changing an ordinary air filter.

The result, says Reifler, is air that's about 90% particle-free. That's especially important to allergy sufferers. Which brings us back to mold.

"Some of the biggest problems allergy sufferers have today are caused by mold," says Reifler. "And it's hard to imagine an air conditioning system that doesn't have mold growth."

He says air conditioning units often are breeding grounds for a variety of microorganisms. "Algae forms in the bottom of the condensate pan, and spores blow out of the **unit and land on surfaces, such as your bathtub, where mildew will grow," says Reifler.**

Variations of this pattern are repeated even in new office buildings with sophisticated hvac systems.

"We have large office buildings that don't have very good air because dirt and mold can pass through their filters. This contributes to the sick building syndrome."

The problem is compounded by material used in some hvac systems. "Glass fiber ductboard is comprised of millions of glass strands that are compressed together and bonded with an organic glue. Once the mold gets into a system, it adheres to the ductboard and feeds on the glue. That's how it promotes its growth in the air duct."

A matter of health

Mold's impact on allergy sufferers is a relatively new area of study, but Reifler says doctors see a link between microorganisms and allergies, as well as asthma attacks.

"One doctor went to his patient's home and discovered the air conditioning system was improperly installed. The evaporator coil was not tilted, so water stayed in the drain pan, which was a perfect breeding ground for mold," says Reifler

SANDY REIFLER does a quick clean job on one of his electrostatic air filters.

Air Cleaners For Allergy Problems

SANDY REIFLER
(713) 568-6483

9550 Deering #308
Houston, Tx 77036

Dust, pollen, lint, and smoke particles so small they can be seen only through an electron microscope also contribute to respiratory problems, doctors agree. Accordingly, Reifler works with allergy specialists across the state promoting his product. His marketing material includes a "prescription form" that doctors will sign recommending the use of a high-efficiency air filtration device for their patients. In some cases, patients can deduct the purchase cost on their taxes as a medical expense.

Currently, Reifler is working with a Michigan area doctor who has developed a chemical that prevents mold and mildew growth on air conditioning unit evaporative coils.

Clean work

Reifler switched from traditional hvac contracting because, "that was hot and dirty work. And, at the time, not many people were doing filtration work. One company, however, introduced an electrostatic air filter that claimed it was just as good as an electronic air cleaner. It wasn't, but people could definitely see a decrease in the amount of dust settling on their furniture. Further, some people with allergies found relief because the filter was collecting more of the mold. Doctors started recommending them because they were less expensive than electronic air cleaners."

Reifler developed his own electrostatic air filter. It used a foam filter media and, "sold really well," Reifler says. Four years ago, Dacron polyester was substituted as the filter media. Sales have steadily grown, topping 2,000 units in 1987.

As interest grows in air filtration, especially for allergy sufferers, Reifler sees a bright future.

"This is going to be an area of very special interest," he says.

Air Conditioning | Heating | Refrigeration
the NEWS
THE HVACR CONTRACTOR'S NEWSMAGAZINE SINCE 1926