



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for
Cultural Materials
Conservation

MOULD

Mould can cause devastating and irreversible damage to your heritage items. It also poses health risks to anyone handling the mouldy material. There are some simple things you can do to: a) prevent mould developing in the first place and b) if it does develop, to limit the amount of damage it can do.

WHAT IS MOULD?

Moulds are types of fungi that are present in the air and on most surfaces. Mould can appear as furry or powdery growth on the surface of an item and is often accompanied with a musty damp odour. Mould grows quickly when the environmental conditions are warm, damp or wet, dark and still. It can stay dormant for decades, only becoming active when conditions are right for germination. Mould can spread easily from one material to another with the flow of air. Damage to heritage items can include weakening and staining of paper, books and textiles.

HOW TO PREVENT MOULD

The best way to prevent mould growth is to deny mould spores the moisture needed for germination.

- Avoid storage areas that are more likely to be damp, such as: sheds, garages, attics, basements or against external walls.
- Do not store objects directly on the floor as this is where water will pool.
- Check objects often to identify mould before it has time to spread, especially after a humid period or heavy rain.
- Regularly dust objects with a soft brush (dust traps moisture which enables mould to grow, even on metal items).
- Store objects in clean and dry conditions with good air flow.
- Consider boxing objects to provide extra protection in the event of a flood or burst pipe.

RESOURCES



Dealing with mould, State Library of NSW, available online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/o2wi>



Preservation Advisory Centre – Mould, British Library, available online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/y2wi>

WHAT TO DO IF YOU DISCOVER MOULD

Knowing whether the mould is active or dormant will give you an idea of how to proceed. Active mould tends to smudge if touched and is more likely to have a damp smell. It needs to be dried out before any further treatment. Dormant mould looks dry and powdery and is more easily brushed away.

Mould spores, whether active or dormant, are harmful to humans and some people are more sensitive than others. Treat all mould with caution, especially if you have existing respiratory problems or allergies. If possible, seek the assistance of a professional conservator who has the right equipment to deal with the mould safely. If this is not an option, you can clean the mould away yourself provided you follow the health and safety precautions outlined below.

The aim of the cleaning is to:

- remove the mould
- stop it from re-growing
- prevent it from spreading to other items
- remove a health hazard.

STEPS IN DEALING WITH MOULD

1. Deal with mould quickly to prevent spreading.
2. Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as a lab coat or similar, gloves (latex or nitrile), respirator mask fitted with particulate filters (if not available a P2 dust mask will provide some protection).
3. Isolate mouldy items in sealed bag.
4. Establish work area away from other objects.
5. Line tables with butcher's paper that can be thrown out afterwards.
6. If mould is active, allow item to air-dry first, outside in sun if possible and safe for the object.
7. Remove mould from item using brush vacuuming method – a soft brush, brushing the mould away from the object, up into the nozzle of the vacuum. Or, if the item is not too fragile, use a micro attachment on the vacuum and carefully brush vacuum the surface to remove mould spores.
8. After handling mouldy items remove all PPE and discard as appropriate or wash in hot soapy water. Thoroughly wash face and hands.
9. If the mould developed due to poor storage conditions, ensure that improvements have been made before the item is returned:
10. Eliminate source of dampness if possible or consider alternative locations for storage.
11. If storing in same location thoroughly clean the shelves before you return the items.
12. Consider placing your item in a protective enclosure such as a box to help buffer the item against changes in humidity.

SUMMARY

Knowing and managing your environment effectively can be an easy way to protect your collection from unwanted damage. Remember to check objects regularly, and if mould is identified – act quick.