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TAMPA TRIBUNE

THIRD TIME MAY BE CHARM FOR FIREFIGHTERS' NEW HOME

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Memo: LOCAL FOCUS

LAKELAND - Now that a second site for a fire station was found to be moldy, a search for a third site is under way.

Lakeland firefighters who were planning to move out of their moldy north side fire station Wednesday got an unpleasant surprise: The building they were going to move into had its own case of terminal mold. So it's off to a third location for the 18 firefighters.

City officials were readying a Detroit Tigers spring training dormitory as an alternate site when they found that a cook there habitually kept his windows open all the time - even with the air conditioner on. That allowed Florida's high summertime humidity to creep into the building, stoking the growth of mold along the walls.

City Manager Gene Strickland is lining up another location for the firefighters and rescue trucks. Today, they will be moved to the firefighters' training facility at Tigertown.

The move comes only a week after half of Lakeland City Hall was evacuated because of black toxic mold that was found in air conditioning ducts on the third floor.

The same kind of mold is suspected in the north side fire station, but it won't be known until laboratory results come in next week, said Wayne Snell, assistant fire chief.

Several firefighters had complained about runny noses, sinus problems and sore throats before the mold was detected, Snell said.

He praised the city's swiftness in finding an alternate station - a contrast to the several weeks it took the city to evacuate city hall.

"It seems our firefighters are pretty pleased about the response we've had from the city," Snell said.

It should take about 30 days to clean the mold on the walls and ceiling tiles, he

said, and at that time it will be determined if it is safe to move back.

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