

Mold liability

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The May 1994 issue of ACTS FACTS 8(5) (Arts, Crafts, and Theater Safety, 181 Thompson Street, #23, New York, NY 10012, 212-777-0062) has a number of useful articles for conservators. Most disconcerting is the lead one, on a c. \$400,000,000 suit by staff and former staff against the New Museum of Contemporary Art, charging the museum with responsibility for disabilities caused by the growth of toxic mold (identified as *Stachybotrys atra*) in the sub-basement of the museum's exhibit space. If the plaintiffs win, the museum's board will apparently be held liable for any awards the museum itself can't pay. ACTS FACTS goes on to say that all board members of non-profit corporations like museums (and presumably libraries and archives, regional centers, etc.) are similarly liable if poor sanitation, mold, air pollutants, or inadequate ventilation expose the institution, staff, or public to health damage.

ACTS FACTS 8(5) also includes a daunting list of diseases caused in humans by fungi, bacteria, parasites, and other biological sources found in soil, molds, scat, insect bites and refuse. Many of them are listed as difficult to treat or responsible for significant fatalities. It is critical to protect yourself with appropriate respirators and other cover-ups when working with suspect objects. See Lois Price's new handout for CCAHA (\$3.00, CCAHA, 215-545-0613) for a good summary of cautionary practices and NEDCC's new handout on mold (free, NEDCC) for a good summary of preventive strategies.

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