

Military OneSource Podcast — Mold Management

Program title: Podcast 1: Mold Management

Episode transcript:

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Hi, I'm Bruce Moody. Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast.

Moving. That's our topic for today. Moving is tough. We do it a lot in the military. And sure, we get smarter about it with every move, but it just never seems to get any easier.

So, with this podcast, we're bringing in folks from TRANSCOM, and that's the U.S. Transportation Command, and they have the Defense Personal Property Management Office. And, as the name suggests, they're in charge of getting your stuff packed up, shipped off, then delivered to your new home. We'll do a number of podcasts with the Personal Property Management Office, and, with each, we'll touch on a particular aspect of moving that can cause you stress.

Today, we're going to talk about mold. And my guest today is Jason Middleton. He is chief of the Personal Property Office in Europe. Jason, welcome to the podcast.

Jason Middleton:

Well, thanks Bruce. Thanks for having me.

Bruce:

It's good to have you here. So, give us a little bit of background about yourself, but also tell us what you do and the area that you cover.

Jason:

Well, Bruce, I've been with USTRANSCOM for about approximately five years now. I'm a 23-year Air Force retiree, all 23 years spent as part of the Traffic Management or TMO Career Food, as most folks in the Air Force know it. I'm currently sitting in beautiful

Germany, serving, as you mentioned, the chief of DPMO, the Defense Personal Property Management Office UCOM Team. We essentially are the TRANSCOM point of contact for any personal property issue within Europe, Africa or the Middle East.

Bruce:

That's a big chunk of the planet, so that's really interesting. And I'm glad that you're joining us from Germany. Let's get right into it. When it comes to moving your stuff, how big a concern is mold for household good shipments?

Jason:

Well, Bruce, mold is a natural part of environment and can be found just about anywhere. And it usually isn't a problem unless it begins to grow in your home or in your personal property shipment. A contaminated personal property shipment can spread mold to other cargo, personal property shipments in a trailer, a warehouse or a ship. So, I think the most important thing is for us to, when we discover or if there's potentially mold, take steps to mitigate and remediate the mold as soon as it's detected.

Bruce:

OK. So, let's talk about the discovery. There are points during a move when mold might be discovered. Let's just start with the pickup of stuff. What happens at that point in a move?

Jason:

Well, during a pickup, if a moving company arrives at your residence and there's potentially mold there, they're going to just stop the move. I think that's the best idea, is just for everyone to just stop the move itself. And then from that point on, the customer will have a few options.

First, they could just basically dispose of all the items identified as contaminated with mold and proceed with rescheduling shipment. Or they also can perform a partially procured move or PPM for those items identified as contaminated with mold and then once again, reschedule their shipment. Or they can hire a company that specializes in mold sampling and testing and interpreting the results to verify the mold.

So, now, if the mold test is negative, they'll just contact their Transportation Office and reschedule the shipment to be packed. If the mold test is positive, however, they'll have a few things they must consider. First, disposing of the items identified as contaminated with mold, then performing a PPM for the mold-contaminated items. Or, having your property remediated of mold at your personal expense by a third-party company. Remediation of the property must be completed before the pack and pickup would begin. After remediation of the property, you'll just need to provide a copy of your certificate to the moving company, just authenticating that the mold has been taken care of.

Bruce:

OK. So now, the next point in the process of moving would be transit. What happens if mold is discovered in transit?

Jason:

Well, if the mold is discovered in transit, the movement company will take the time to contact you, the customer, the servicing Military Claims Office and the Inspecting Transportation Office to provide an update on their findings. Onward movement of the shipment will continue to a designated location. And the moving company will inform the Transportation Office. The Transportation Office will in turn arrange for a quality control inspector to be available at a particular location within two business days of being notified. And that quality control inspector will ensure that they're there when the seals are broken and the personal property containers are tested by a mold remediation firm.

Bruce:

So finally, at the delivery, what happens if mold is discovered when the personal property is being delivered?

Jason:

Well, that delivery, if mold is discovered at delivery, then the customer should immediately contact their local Transportation Office. Delivery should be halted. What they'll do is they'll tell the delivery crew to just stop the move itself. No more property will be placed in their residence. The moving company delivering the shipment will immediately reload all of their property back on the truck to prevent further contamination. The delivery company will then take your property to another location for storage.

Bruce:

OK. Let's pause at this point and go over some terminology that seems to be really kind of important when we're talking about mold. The two terms that I'm hearing and I'd like you to define, are remediation and mitigation. When we talk about remediation and mitigation, what is the difference of those two terms and how do they apply to mold in a personal property shipment?

Jason:

Bruce, that's a good question because those two terms have a tendency to be confusing. So first, mitigation. Mitigation is the steps taken to prevent or reduce the severity of mold contamination. For example, the wiping down or drying off of wet items or separation of items contaminated with mold from uncontaminated items.

Now, remediation is the steps taken by a mold remediation firm to clean the items that have been contaminated. Now, of special note, heavily contaminated porous items such as carpets and rugs and mattresses and clothing, and even some wood and wood products may not be able to be remediated.

Bruce:

OK. All right. So, good. We're making some progress here. So now, if it's suspected that a shipment has mold, how does the process work to verify and either get your item either restored or replaced?

Jason:

OK. So, first the moving company will have to hire a firm that specializes in mold sampling, testing and interpreting. And the key is verifying that there is mold. And as I mentioned, if the mold test is negative, the moving company will advise you, the local Transportation Office and the Military Claims Office of their findings. And then the delivery will be rescheduled.

Now, if the mold test is positive, the moving company will advise once again, advise the three parties – you, the local Transportation Office and the Military Claims Office. The Military Claims Office will then take the lead in a lot of the coordination. The Military Claims Office will need to provide the moving company authorization before they can begin remediation of your mold-contaminated items.

Now, once the remediation is complete, the customer will be given the opportunity to inspect the remediated items. Now, they can accept all, some or none of the remediated items. The delivery of the personal property will then be rescheduled.

Now, there are some important details on the refusal of remediated items that they definitely need to know. They'll definitely want to stay in contact with the Military Claims Office before refusing to accept any remediated items. The moving company is also responsible for redelivering accepted remediated items and or disposing of the items that cannot be remediated. And you may also file a claim for any unaccepted remediated items for compensation at the full replacement value.

Now, when the Military Claims Office determines that the remediation is appropriate, Claims Reimbursement will be limited to the lesser of the remediated cost or the full replacement value. The cost of any remediation counts toward the moving company's maximum liability.

Bruce:

When we talk about mold, obviously it's unsightly. It's an inconvenience, but also, among other things, there are health concerns. So, can you get into the aspect of mold as it pertains to health conditions?

Jason:

Sure, Bruce. Important. If you or your family member has an existing health condition that might be aggravated by exposure to mold, you'll want to immediately notify all parties involved. And that's your moving company, the Transportation Office and the Military Claims Office. It's important that they know exactly what the health condition is of your family or of yourself, so that during that remediation process, they can make decisions on whether to dispose or replace of some items.

Bruce:

OK. So that process, the whole process, the testing and the cleaning and the remediation of your property, that takes some time. And I think that's something that's really important to really emphasize. Can you get into that for us?

Jason:

Yes, absolutely. The cleaning and the remediation process takes some time. So, what we ask of our customers is to please be patient and contact your Transportation Office if you have any questions during that entire process itself.

Now, in this situation, you can also file a claim with your moving company for loss of any essential items. You just want to notify the moving company, the Military Claims Office and the Transportation Office of the loss of any essential items within seven days of the delivery.

Now, you may ask, "OK, what are the essential items?" Well, the essential items can be your refrigerator or other appliances necessary for the safe storage and preparation of food, necessary medical equipment, mattresses, and washers and dryers.

And note, you can also file an Inconvenience Claim with the moving company, if the completion of the testing and remediation delays delivery past your required delivery date, but just know that the moving company's Inconvenience Claim liability terminates 15 days after payment is received by you for those essential items.

Bruce:

OK. So those are the essential items – the washer, the dryer, the fridge, got it. Different though, I have a couple of items that are special to me. They have special value, sentimental value. Maybe they're not considered essential, but they're essential to me. What's the process for that?

Jason:

Well, all you've got to do is reach out to your Transportation Office and your Military Claims Office, and just let them know that you've got some items of sentimental value or special value to you. Your moving company, they will coordinate with your moving

company and your moving company will offer you the opportunity to look through your property and remove any items of sentimental value at your particular discretion.

Now, what you'll want to note is that the moving company may require you to sign a releasing document, just releasing them from any personal liability for claiming mold-contaminated items.

Bruce:

Well, Jason, thank you so much for joining us today. We covered a lot of topics, a lot of information here in this conversation, but we do want to let you know that in the program notes of this episode, we have a link on the Military OneSource website to Military OneSource's Moving Your Personal Property landing page. And Jason, if you could just talk about page. What are people going to find when they go there?

Jason:

Sure, Bruce. If they go to the Moving Your Personal Property landing page on Military OneSource, they'll find just an enormous amount of information, not only on mold, but on other moving topics. We also have a fact sheet, a mold fact sheet and several other fact sheets on the page regarding handling shipments, whether it's mold or containerization and other topics. So, please, take a look at that resource page.

Bruce:

Absolutely. So again, we'll put a link to the resource page in the program notes, but bear in mind that you can also call Military OneSource because we have a call center and we'll put a number to our call center as well. And it's just a great way to initiate the process of figuring out your next steps forward regarding this. Jason, thank you so much for joining us today.

Jason:

Thank you for having me.

Bruce:

Absolutely. Jason Middleton joined us from Germany today. He is chief of the Personal Property Office in Europe, and we had a conversation about mold and your personal property.

We want to remind you all that Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department. We're a website, actually a lot of websites, plus apps, and we're a call center and now we're a podcast. We really want you to subscribe to this podcast because we touch on so many aspects of military life. We're here to make sure military families can navigate military life. So, thank you so much. I'm Bruce Moody. I appreciate you listening today. Bye-bye.