

Understanding Mold Testing with Gateway Water & Mold in St. Louis

Mold testing is one of those things that sounds straightforward until you are standing in a damp basement trying to figure out what to do. I have spent years working in water damage restoration and indoor air quality, and I can tell you that the process is more about careful observation than it is about gadgets. A good mold inspection starts with understanding the building, the weather, and the specific concerns of the people who live there.

Gateway Water & Mold, a mold inspection and remediation company in Greater St. Louis, recently put out a short video that walks through how mold testing works inside a house. The video does not overcomplicate things. It shows a technician moving through a home, checking the obvious spots and the hidden ones. That kind of grounded, practical approach is what separates a useful inspection from a checkbox exercise. [Gateway Water & Mold](#)

The Difference Between Testing and Inspection

People often use the words testing and inspection as if they mean the same thing. They do not. An inspection is a visual and physical examination of the property. A test is a specific measurement of air quality or surface contamination. Both are important, but they serve different purposes.

During a typical home inspection for mold, the inspector looks for signs of water damage, musty odor, and visible growth. They check areas like the basement, around windows, near the HVAC system, and inside walls where leaks might have occurred. An inspection camera helps them look inside wall cavities without cutting holes. That is where a lot of hidden mold lives, especially after a slow leak behind drywall.

Testing comes after the inspection, not before. If the inspector finds visible mold or strong evidence of moisture, they may recommend air quality testing to measure the concentration of mold spores in the indoor air. That data gives you a baseline. It tells you whether the indoor air quality is safe and whether remediation has actually worked.

How Mold Testing Works in Practice

I have been on dozens of mold testing jobs, and the procedure is more methodical than most people expect. The first step is to set up the testing equipment in the right locations. You do not just walk into a room and press a button. You have to close windows, turn off blowers, and let the air settle. The goal is to measure the air that people are actually breathing, not the air that is being stirred up by a fan or an open door.

A common method is to use a pump that pulls a measured volume of air across a petri dish or a sticky slide. The particles in the air, including mold spores, land on the collection medium. The sample then goes to a lab for analysis. The lab identifies the types and quantities of mold present. This is where the EPA guidelines come into play. The EPA does not set a specific pass/fail number for mold in homes, but the lab results are compared against outdoor air samples taken the same day. If the indoor levels are significantly higher, or if the types of mold indoors are different from those outdoors, there is a problem.

Some inspectors also use tape lift samples or swabs from surfaces. That is useful when you can see mold but want to know exactly what species it is. Black mold, for example, is a term that gets thrown around a lot, but not all dark-colored mold is the toxic kind. Lab analysis removes the guesswork.

Tools of the Trade

You do not need a lab to start the investigation. A good inspector carries a few basic tools that tell a lot about a house. A moisture meter is essential. It reads the moisture content in materials like drywall, wood, and flooring. If the meter shows elevated readings in a wall that looks dry on the surface, that is a red flag. Water may be sitting inside the wall cavity, feeding mold growth that you cannot see yet.

A hygrometer measures humidity in the air. High humidity alone can cause mold problems, even without a liquid leak. Basements in St. Louis are especially prone to this because of the humid summers and the fact that concrete holds moisture. A hygrometer helps the inspector determine whether the humidity level is within a safe range, typically between 30 and 50 percent.

An inspection camera, as I mentioned, lets you look into tight spaces without cutting holes. I have used them to find mold behind baseboards, inside ductwork, and above ceiling tiles. The camera does not lie. It shows you what is actually happening in places you cannot reach with your eyes.

A HEPA vacuum is another tool that shows up during testing and remediation. Before taking air samples, it is often necessary to clean the area to avoid skewing the results. A HEPA vacuum traps particles that a regular vacuum would blow back into the air. During mold remediation, HEPA vacuums are used to remove spores from surfaces after the visible mold has been cleaned.

Common Mistakes in Mold Testing

One of the biggest mistakes I see is testing too early. If you have a fresh water damage event, the mold has not had time to grow. Testing right after a flood or a pipe burst will give you a

clean result, but that result is misleading. Mold needs moisture and time to colonize. Wait a week or two, or at least until the wet materials have had a chance to dry out, before you test.

Another mistake is testing without a control sample. The outdoor air sample is your reference. Without it, you cannot tell whether the mold levels indoors are elevated or just normal background. The EPA recommends taking at least one outdoor sample for every indoor sample. That is a standard practice in St. Louis and everywhere else.

Some homeowners also rely too heavily on DIY test kits. Those kits can give you a general idea, but they lack the precision of professional sampling. The lab analysis is only as good as the sample collection. A professional knows where to place the pump, how long to run it, and how to avoid contaminating the sample. A kit you buy at the hardware store does not come with that kind of guidance.

What Happens After Testing

The results from a lab usually come back in a few days. The report lists the types of mold found and the spore counts per cubic meter. A good inspector walks you through the report and explains what it means for your home. If the levels are high, the next step is mold remediation. That is not the same as cleaning. Remediation involves removing contaminated materials, treating the area with antimicrobial solutions, and fixing the moisture problem that caused the mold in the first place.

Gateway Water & Mold handles both testing and remediation, which is helpful because the testing results feed directly into the remediation plan. They know what they are looking for and how to fix it. In the video they produced, the technician explains that testing is not just about finding mold. It is about understanding the conditions that allowed mold to grow. That distinction matters because if you only clean the mold without addressing the moisture, it will come back.

Why St. Louis Homes Need Special Attention

The climate in St. Louis makes mold a year-round concern. Hot, humid summers create perfect conditions for mold spores to germinate. In the winter, homes are sealed tight, which reduces ventilation and can trap moisture inside. Poor ventilation in a basement or a crawl space can lead to condensation on cold surfaces. That condensation feeds mold.

Older homes in the area often have basements that were not designed to be living spaces. They may have dirt floors or stone foundations that wick moisture from the ground. A moisture meter and a hygrometer are essential for evaluating those spaces. If the humidity is consistently above 60 percent, mold will eventually appear, even if there is no visible leak.

Newer homes are not immune either. Modern building materials like drywall and oriented strand board are more susceptible to mold than old-growth lumber. A small leak behind a shower wall can turn into a big problem before anyone notices. That is why regular inspections are a good idea, especially after a heavy rain or a plumbing repair.

The Role of Air Quality Testing in Health

Mold spores are allergens. For people with asthma, allergies, or weakened immune systems, prolonged exposure can cause real health problems. Symptoms like sneezing, coughing, headaches, and fatigue are common in homes with hidden mold. Indoor air quality testing gives you objective data about what is in the air you breathe. That data can help you decide whether to remediate, whether to ventilate differently, or whether to move certain activities out of the basement.

I have seen cases where a family was living with a musty odor for years, assuming it was just part of living in an old house. After testing, they discovered high levels of aspergillus and penicillium, two common indoor molds that can trigger respiratory issues. The remediation was straightforward once the problem was identified. The family reported that their sinuses cleared up within a week.

That is the value of professional testing. It turns an invisible problem into a measurable one.

Final Thoughts on Mold Testing

Mold testing is not something you do once and forget about. It is part of maintaining a healthy home, especially in a climate like St. Louis. Whether you are buying a new house, remodeling an old one, or just dealing with a musty basement, a proper inspection and air quality test can save you time and money in the long run. Gateway Water & Mold approaches the process with the kind of practical, hands-on knowledge that comes from doing this work every day. Their video shows that testing does not have to be mysterious. It is just careful observation, good tools, and a little bit of patience.