

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2101

October 20, 2006

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
United States Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

I'm writing to request a study of the U.S. government's efforts to minimize and mitigate illnesses associated with human exposure to mold in housing and other indoor environments. Human exposure to environmental mold and the toxins they produce are known to result in allergic and other hypersensitivity reactions in healthy individuals, and there is growing evidence that a subpopulation of otherwise healthy individuals can, after exposure to environmental mold, develop severe persistent health problems. These health effects, coupled with the unprecedented rebuilding of flooded residences and businesses along the coasts of New Orleans, Mississippi and Louisiana could trigger a significant public health crisis.

In your study, please consider the following questions:

- What are the respective roles of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, the Environmental Protection Agency and other federal agencies in establishing standards for minimizing and mitigating mold-related exposure?
- How has the unprecedented damage to existing housing and building stocks which resulted from the 2005 hurricane season caused these roles to change?
- To what extent have these roles been coordinated across federal agencies?
- What are the federal and state statutes that govern construction/renovation practices in reference to minimizing and mitigating mold-related problems, and what enforcement mechanisms exist?
- What are the federal and state requirements for disclosure of prior evidence of environmental mold?

- In the years since the last GAO report on Indoor Pollution, has the understanding by the medical community and scientific community of mold-related health problems changed?

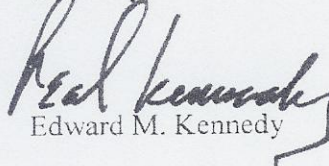
Many examples of mold-related personal injury, property damage and worker compensation claims have been reported in the press. The general perception is that mold-related litigation peaked several years ago and has been declining since then. However, little systematic examination exists of mold-related litigation, mold-related insurance products, and the role of the insurance industry in influencing mold-related litigation. Please consider in your study:

- What is the extent of mold-related personal injury and property damage claims in the United States? Have these claims been increasing or decreasing?
- What efforts have been undertaken by federal agencies to develop, establish, or fund research into a reliable standardized environmental sampling technique to be used in suspected mold exposures?
- What medical and scientific standards are used in determining the admissibility of evidence of both acute and persistent health consequences resulting from exposure to mold? Which individuals and organizations have promulgated these standards and what, if any, conflicts of interest exist regarding these standards?

We look forward to your response to this request. If you have any questions, please let me know, or contact David Bowen at (202) 224-7675.

With great respect and appreciation,

Sincerely,


Edward M. Kennedy