

## ACOEM EXPOSED

### Executive Summary

In 2002 at least two influential members (Grove and Borak) of the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) decided to use the organization to tailor a statement concerning the health effects of mold, one that would be self-described as “evidence-based” or a “defense argument” depending on who the recipient of the information was. The statement would be subjected to a process of “peer review” and then published by ACOEM.

From reading internal emails, one can deduce it was foreseeable that the statement would provide a cover for the insurance industry and others to avoid liability for illness associated with indoor mold exposure. These two members recruited 3 authors whose views were known. Two are principals in a litigation defense support corporation. One was fresh from the tobacco industry – an expert witness on behalf of Phillip Morris. And a “paper” was soon produced. The ACOEM recruiter (Borak) supervised the peer review, but admitted at one point to Grove (who had asked for the creation of the paper) that *“If we ‘officially’ reject it, we turn his efforts into garbage”* and 4 days later to another colleague *“I don’t want to subject Bryan and colleagues to public criticism that might diminish the value of their contribution. I assume that it will have currency for them in other ways and in other places.”* A sorry excuse for an unbiased peer review, but clear as to the logic and motive. Garbage can have monetary value particularly if others call it science.

The paper was a canard when written. As Shakespeare might have put it “It is a tale .... full of sound and fury signifying nothing”. More than 3 years later it is a canard and until now, a dirty little secret of the ACOEM. It has damaged the lives of many good people that are truly ill – poisoned by mold toxins which are often as devastating as the mold toxins that Saddam used against the Kurds. To be clear, it is not the fact that the paper was cynical, poorly written and bereft of logic and fact that has done the damage. It is not the fact that none of the 83 papers supposedly being reviewed support the “evidence” of human illness is “highly unlikely”. Many are the B movies that opened Friday and closed Saturday without harm to anyone. No, it was the imprimatur of a Medical “College” with 6,000 physicians as members, it was that imprimatur and the cynical use of it, that did the harm.

Entrepreneurs might understand the feelings of the 3 defense witnesses when given this opportunity. It must have seemed like manna from heaven. No effective supervision – you write it and we will get it published - seems to have been the undertone. Sadly without the discipline of a Disclosure of Conflicts; without the discipline of a real peer review (“Please note, only the tone, not the content will be modified” –the ACOEM Director of Communications instructed the few “peer reviewers”); indeed without any real restraints, the trio simply did not do their best work if it was a work of academic or scientific rigor that was wanted. But, quite the opposite, what was wanted was something that would have *“currency ... in other ways and in other places”*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> p. 6. infra.

No, the damage is not solely down to the authors whose self-serving “testimony” would have been exposed for the calumny Dr. Borak apparently feared<sup>2</sup> were it not for the cynical endorsement of ACOEM. It is ACOEM which has allowed the authors to build a business out of testifying that mold does no real harm – *mold may produce allergens in sufficient quantity to make an impact, but not spores and not mycotoxins*. Utter humbug. The greatest dangers of water damaged buildings are about biotoxin illness not about allergens and allergies.

Other bandwagon jumpers of the allergist persuasion make a good living from this same tune. Recently (Feb. 2006) one of the ACOEM authors, a member of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (Academy) helped create a position statement for the Academy. Once again, no conflicts were disclosed by any of the authors. This article sang the allergy aria and predictably cited the ACOEM paper. The manipulation has thus become circular as those with self-serving interests write and publish the same “information” repeatedly. Only the packaging changes. The media knows no better and so chimes in. Ding dong ding. Ring wrong ring. The falsehoods take on a life of their own. With one author already requesting his name be withdrawn, and with letters of protest from physicians and researchers all across the US and Canada, the Academy is currently rethinking their position.

It should be noted, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology was established in 1943. The association has nearly 6,300 members in the United States, Canada and 60 other countries. The Medical Association and its publication journal are world renown for their ethics in medicine. We are grateful for the Academy’s ability to adhere to their ethics and to stand tall in their acknowledgement they may have made an error.

Still, how are we to develop effective diagnosis and treatment for mold related disease when the hue and cry of the money-changers drowns out the soft sounds of truth? Can science continue to raise a small and insightful voice against the cynical manipulation of the media, of public opinion and of the courts; manipulation by big business allied with a few professionals for hire, the ones who pull along other professionals too caught up in their daily grind to pay proper attention? As an entrepreneur and businessperson it embarrasses me. As a mold patient I am damaged. So I have spoken out.

Shame on you doctors. Shame on you cynical consultants manipulating the system against the weak in order to feather your comfy nests. Shame on you ACOEM.

What ‘good’ are you all going to do? The rest of us expect far more from our physicians.

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<sup>2</sup> “garbage” – p. 6. op.cit.

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