

News Column – Donna Krug, Cottonwood Extension District Director and Family & Consumer Science Agent – K-State Research and Extension

Basement Moisture Problems Continue

For many people the huge amount of rain our area encountered last May is a distant memory. But for those who have been dealing flooded basements the saga continues. Recently a home owner brought a jar of a white powdery substance that was coming out of the cracks in the floor and walls of his basement into our office. He didn't think it was mold and he was right in his assumption.

The white substance is "efflorescence." It often looks like mold, but really it is caused by salt deposits. When water seeps through concrete, brick, or stone, it can leave behind salt deposits. When the water evaporates, what remains is a white crystalline substance that resembles mold. It's not a fungus, though, won't grow or spread, and does not cause any of the health problems that mold sometimes causes.

How can you tell if you have white mold or efflorescence? First, look at the type of material on which you see the white substance. If you see it on anything other than concrete or masonry, it is most likely mold. Second, spray the substance with a little water in a spray bottle and simply wipe it with a rag. If that removes it, it is not mold.

The steps to get rid of efflorescence include:

- 1) Fill a bucket with warm water. Use a large sponge to thoroughly wet down the efflorescence spots on the walls. Work in sections about 3 square feet so the water does not dry before you have a chance to get rid of the efflorescence.
- 2) Scrub the section of the basement wall briskly with a plastic-bristled scrub brush. Rinse that section of the wall with a clean sponge and water. Use plenty of water when rinsing the wall. Let the walls air-dry.
- 3) Fill a bucket with undiluted white vinegar if the efflorescence remains. Fill a separate bucket with warm water. Use a plastic-bristled scrub brush to scrub 3-square-foot sections of the walls with the vinegar. Rinse well with plenty of clean water.

I have continued to direct people with questions to the EPA Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture and your Home. It has excellent pictures and descriptions on how to clean up mold. You can download your copy at: [www.epa.gov > mold > brief-guide-mold-moisture-and-your-home](http://www.epa.gov/mold/brief-guide-mold-moisture-and-your-home)

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