

Hidden Mold in a Rental Home: A Real Mold Remediation St. Louis Case

When a Plumbing Leak Leads to a Hidden Problem

I got a call from a property manager in the Central West End. A tenant in a rental home had noticed a musty smell near the bathroom wall for about a week. They'd already called a plumber, who fixed a slow leak in the supply line behind the vanity. The plumber had even dried the visible water on the floor. But the smell got worse. That is a classic sign that the real problem is inside the wall cavity. Water finds the path of least resistance, and behind that drywall, it had been pooling and wicking upward for days.

By the time I arrived, the tenant had moved a dresser away from the wall and noticed a dark stain spreading near the baseboard. The moisture meter I carry confirmed what my nose already told me: the drywall was holding moisture at 30 percent, well above the threshold where mold spores begin to colonize. This is where professional mold remediation St. Louis teams earn their keep. It is not just about cleaning a surface. It is about finding the full extent of the damage before it affects the air quality and the structure.

Finding the Mold Behind the Wall

We started by opening a small inspection hole near the stain. The back side of the drywall was covered in black and green growth. The paper facing had delaminated in a few spots. The studs showed dark streaks where moisture had traveled. A quick check with a borescope confirmed the growth extended about two feet above the pipe penetration. This is common in rental homes where maintenance is reactive rather than proactive. The leak had been slow, so the water had time to spread before anyone noticed the smell.

Once we confirmed the affected area, we set up containment. We sealed off the bathroom door and the nearby hallway with poly sheeting and a zipper entry. We ran a HEPA-filtered negative air machine to keep spores from drifting into the rest of the home. This is a step that some DIY guides skip, but it is essential for mold remediation in an occupied space. The tenant stayed with a relative for two nights, which gave us clear access without worrying about respiratory exposure.

Removing the Contaminated Drywall

We cut out the drywall in sections, starting from the bottom and working up. Each piece went directly into a heavy-duty trash bag. We wore Tyvek suits, N95 respirators, and gloves. The studs and the bottom plate were wet, so we used a moisture meter to map the damp areas.

The insulation had to go too. It was matted and smelled of mildew. We bagged it all and sealed the bags before moving them to the garage for disposal.

At this point, the property manager asked about the cost of the insurance claim. The tenant had renter's insurance, but the plumbing leak was the landlord's responsibility. The water damage claim would cover the drywall, the insulation, the paint, and the labor. The mold remediation itself, however, often falls into a gray area. Some policies cover mold removal only if it results from a covered water loss. In this case, the mold was a direct result of the plumbing leak, so the claim went through. The property manager was relieved. Without insurance, the out-of-pocket cost for professional [mold remediation St. Louis](#) can run into the thousands, depending on the square footage of the affected wall.

Drying and Treating the Cavity

We did not just patch the wall and call it done. Structural drying is the step that separates a thorough job from a shortcut. We set up air movers and a dehumidifier inside the open wall for 48 hours. The moisture readings on the studs dropped from 25 percent to below 10 percent. Only then did we apply an antimicrobial treatment to the wood. We used a borate-based spray that soaks into the grain and prevents future growth. It is safe around pets and people once it dries, which is important in a rental home where a family lives.

We also inspected the adjacent wall in the bedroom. The leak had traveled along the plumbing chase, but the moisture meter showed low levels there. We decided not to open it, but we noted it in the report for the property manager to monitor after the repair. Mold testing can sometimes give false peace of mind if you only sample the air. We prefer to combine visual inspection with moisture readings to make sure we are not missing hidden pockets.

Reassembly and Encapsulation

After the cavity was dry and treated, we installed new insulation and hung new drywall. We used mold-resistant drywall in the bathroom, which has a fiberglass facing instead of paper. It costs a bit more, but it is worth it in a room with high humidity. We taped and mudded the joints, then applied a primer that contains a mildewcide. The final coat of paint was a satin finish that resists moisture. The tenant chose a light gray, which was a nice change from the builder-grade white.

The baseboard went back on with a bead of caulk at the bottom to prevent water from wicking up from the floor. The plumber had already replaced the supply line with a braided stainless steel hose, which is less likely to leak than the old copper compression fitting. The whole process, from first inspection to final paint, took five days. The tenant moved back in and said the air felt fresher. That is the best compliment a remediation crew can get.

Lessons for Property Managers and Tenants

This job reinforced a few things I tell every property manager I work with in Greater St. Louis. First, act fast on any water damage. A plumbing leak that goes unnoticed for even a few days can turn a simple drywall repair into a full mold remediation project. Second, do not rely on air fresheners or bleach sprays. They mask the smell temporarily but do not remove the source. Third, make sure your tenant knows to report musty odors right away. A tenant who waits a week because they do not want to bother anyone can end up with a bigger problem and a longer disruption.

For the property manager, this case also highlighted the value of a good relationship with a remediation company that understands the local building code and the insurance landscape. Gateway Water & Mold handled the coordination with the adjuster and provided the documentation needed to close the claim. That kind of service saves the property manager hours of phone calls and paperwork.

Mold removal is not a glamorous job, but it is a necessary one. When it is done right, the wall looks like nothing ever happened. The tenant is comfortable, the property is protected, and the manager can sleep easier knowing the issue is truly resolved. That is why professional mold remediation St. Louis services exist: to turn a hidden health hazard back into a safe, dry home.