

## **HANDY TIPS TO GET RID OF MUSTY ODOR FROM YOUR HOME BASEMENT**

*"To clean smelly basement floors use a cup of borax cleaner to one gallon of water, and apply the mixture with a sponge and start scrubbing."*

Basements are one of the most common odor producers in the home. There are a number of things that can cause bad smells in this location.

Musty odors are caused by mildew and mold, which grows and thrives in damp locations. A musty odor coming from the basement is most often noticed in spring and fall when utilities aren't running and the windows are closed. To help prevent basement odors be sure to keep your home well ventilated.

The biggest problem with odors in the house is caused by mildew and mold accumulation which can not only cause deterioration of the house but also create health problems like allergies and asthma. Use ventilation, windows, dehumidifiers etc. to keep the level of humidity down. Having your air ducts cleaned and your ventilation system checked yearly, or at least every 2 years, is a good idea.

### **Eliminate Musty Basement Odors:**

- There are two distinct causes of damp basements, moisture condensation and water leaks. If your home basement smells damp, or musty, use dehumidifiers and give the room a good air out by opening windows. Make sure your basement is waterproof as a small leak can cause a lot of moisture and if there are visible water stains or leaks it is important to get these taken care of before they cause damage to the foundation. Be sure to inspect the area around the house to ensure water flows away from the house. Extend gutter downspouts at least 6 feet from foundation walls. Correct any problem areas where rain water may collect ensuring the ground slopes away from the foundation.
- For mildew and mold make a solution 1/2 cup of bleach to a gallon of hot water. Pour the mix into a spray bottle and work your way around cleaning up the area keeping the windows open. Use this mixture on cement, walls, floors, bathrooms, laundry areas and other locations that will not have a reaction to bleach.
- Try putting kitty litter in open containers in basements, closets, etc. Change as needed. It will help rid the area of musty smells. This also works in vacant, closed up houses.
- To clean smelly basement floors use a cup of borax cleaner to one gallon of water, and apply the mixture with a sponge and start scrubbing.
- Leave several bowls, or old containers, with some white vinegar in them placed around the basement (full strength). At first the air may smell strongly of the vinegar, but after a day there will be no more musty smells at all.
- Place an opened container of baking soda in the basement, as baking soda will absorb the unpleasant odors for up to three months.
- Basement plumbing can become covered in condensation causing water to run down the pipes and drip onto the basement floor or behind wall coverings. To remedy this problem

wrap the pipes with an insulated pipe wrap, an inexpensive material and an easy way to prevent dampness and musty odors in your basement.

### **Commercial Products for Basement Odors:**

- *The Smelleze® Basement Deodorizer Pouch* - Specially developed to solve musty smell problems in the basement using a unique dual mechanism. It absorbs excessive moisture from the air to lower the relative humidity thereby destroying mold and mildew. Secondly, it eliminates musty basement odors on contact without covering them up with fragrances.
- *Gonzo Corporation OEB212 Basement Odor Eliminator* - Lasts forever simply recharge in sunlight. Removes musty odors caused by damp moldy basements.
- *House Basement Odor Absorber Air Freshener* - Contains volcanic minerals with a natural ionic charge and completely erases problem odors. Simply hang the packs up and walk away. A single pack deodorizes up to 600 sq. ft. of space. Placed in the air return of your central A/C or heating system, Odor Absorber House keeps 1,000 sq. ft. naturally odor-free. Recharge in sunlight for a lifetime of use in any climate.
- *E-Z Breathe(R)* - A maintenance free unit that helps protect your home and family from excess moisture, molds, toxins, allergies and poor air quality resulting in a cleaner, healthier living environment. It provides powerful ventilation, supporting both the EPA and the American Lung Associations recommendations to use a ventilated system to reduce indoor air pollution.
- *Basement Odor Absorber* - Formulated especially for neutralizing musty odors from mold, mildew, smoke, pets and more, the odor-absorbing gel works around the clock to bring freshness to air-starved spaces. Leaves behind the crisp, clean scent of pine that greets you each time you descend the stairs. Terrific for basements both finished and unfinished, in homes old and new.

## **Removing Basement Odors**

Don't feel bad because basements frequently have that old, mildewy smell.

When something smells "off", it simply needs to be cleaned, decaying items removed, and the environmental conditions changed to stop further odors from developing.

Deodorizers and air fresheners make it smell better, but the effect is a temporary mask. It is far more important in the long run to get the odor under control and fix the problem cause before it worsens.

There are 2 easy steps to take when it comes to basement odors:

1. Remove or repair the problem that is causing the foul smell.
2. Clean the area to reduce the smell, control and prevent any odor from coming back.

Luckily, there are some common things that cause odor to develop, and they are easily fixed. Find the solution to your odor problem by following these tips below.

## **Causes of Old, Musty, Moldy, Mildewy & Smelly Basements:**

Basements are one of the most common odor producers in the home, right behind the refrigerator and the cat box. There are several things that can cause basement odors. These are the most common causes of smelly basements and what you need to do to fix it:

### Inadequate Cleaning:

**The Problem:** You know the old saying: *"Out of sight, out of mind"*. Dust, dirt, grime, cobwebs and decay develops and builds up over time. Rodents and insects can take up residence without you knowing and create foul odors, unhealthy and unsanitary living conditions for you and your family. Mold and mildew put off foul odors that can be absorbed and spread to stored items.

**The Fix:** Give the basement a **good overall cleaning**. Start at the ceiling, clean down the walls and behind every item. Use bleach, borax or vinegar to clean and control odor. Clear out old junk stored in the basement. Remove things that absorb moisture or can put off bad smells such as clothing or carpet. A clean area doesn't just look better, it smells better too. Clutter reduces air flow and mildew frequently develops on decaying items.

Now, once your basement is nice and clean and the clutter and junk are cleared out, check these other areas that may be causing the smell.

### Moisture:

**The Problem:** One of the most common problems with the basement is the amount of moisture. Moisture causes mold, mildew, bacteria, fungal growth and causes wood, fabric and paper to start to rot. The very first thing to do is to get the basement dry. Even before you start cleaning, get the humidity down.

**The Fix:** You need to **dry it out**. To do this, use a **dehumidifier** and **air out** the location by opening windows. If you see water **leaking** from faucets or pipes **or cracks** in your foundation you must get that repaired to stop water from leaking into the area. If you see water **stains**, investigate the source and get it fixed. Allowing water to accumulate will cause more serious problems than just a bad smell. You must get these taken care of before they damage the home's foundation.

### Poor Air Circulation:

**The Problem:** Poor air circulation all by itself isn't a cause of basement odor, but it does make it worse by allowing **air to become stagnant** and allow bad smells to become more obvious. Moving air also helps **water to evaporate**. Stagnant air makes mold and mildew worse when spores are released into the air and easily spread to other damp areas.

**The Fix:** Get the air moving by **opening a window**, turning on a **fan**, opening the doors or other methods.

### Low Light and Temperature:

**The Problem:** Low lighting and air temperature can also promote odors. Dark, damp low light and air circulation creates the **perfect environment** for mold and mildew to grow or **basement contents to decay unseen**.

**The Fix:** Bring up the air temperature by using a portable area heater, turn on the lights and open the curtains. Heated rooms help water to evaporate. You'll be able to see the problem areas more easily in the light.

### Mold and Mildew Growth:

**The Problem:** Mold, mildew and fungus grows in **damp areas with low lighting and thrive with poor air circulation**. These organisms put off a gas that we most commonly associate with a smelly basement. Poor air circulation makes the smell worse and allows the spread of mold and mildew to other areas with time.

**The Fix:** You need to **clean up moldy areas** and scrub away visible stains. Borax is the perfect thing to use to clean this because it's a natural mineral cleaner that **also kills fungus (fungicide)** and prevents further regrowth. It's used in laundry soap. It's the main ingredient in the product 20 Mule Team.

**To Clean It-**To make your mold and mildew cleaning solution mix the following in a bucket:

- one cup of borax cleaner
- one gallon of hot water

Use a scrub brush to clean the area and follow with a rinse of clean water as borax will leave a residue.

**To Remove Stains-** Remove stains and fight off mold and mildew regrowth with a bleach and water solution:

- 2 cups of bleach
- 2 quarts of hot water

Pour the solution into a spray bottle and work your way around spraying areas where you see visible staining, or suspect are causing odor problems. Keep in mind that there is water in this solution, so use sparingly to avoid contributing to a moisture problem.

Bleach will liquefy, sanitize and remove the color (bleach it!) on contact, depending on the surface it's being used on.

Chlorine bleach is a very good sanitizer but I don't use bleach frequently. Because it bleaches everything it comes into contact with I find it can **cause more harm than good if you accidentally get it on an unintended surface**. But this is one project where it is justified because it works like no other cleaning chemical will do.

Bleach is strongly alkaline and is very harsh. It may be a commonly used product, but you should respect it too. It will erode and corrode many things, and make the surface very slippery. It will burn your skin if it is not rinsed off. Bleach also removes the color from fabric on contact with no second chances. So rinse the area with plain water after using. Also, **never use bleach in conjunction with any other cleaning product**. It will react to many things and **put off a toxic gas** that could be very serious in an area of low air circulation.

## How to Keep Your Basement Smelling Fresh:

There are several things that you can do to keep the odors at bay and keep your basement smelling fresh and clean.

- **Keep the home and the basement adequately ventilated**. Air needs to flow through the home to allow for it to be kept clean. To make sure this happens, have your air ducts cleaned and also have your ventilation system checked yearly.
- **Control the humidity**. The biggest odor causing problem in homes is that of mildew and mold. Use ventilation, windows, dehumidifiers and effective means for keeping water out to keep the level of humidity down.

- **Clean your dryer vent.** Start outside where it exits and follow it down into the home to the base of the dryer. Blocked dryer vents allow moisture to build up in the home. If the dryer is in the basement, this can be the original source of basement odors to start with. Rodents can take up residence in the vent attracted to the lint that makes a nice nest and warm temperatures
- **Waterproof the basement.** Water is the cause of many air quality problems. Make sure your basement is waterproof. A small leak can cause a tremendous amount of moisture and cause the other side of the home to smell bad.
- **Keep the home clean.** Get the garbage out of the house quickly; keep the floors clean and pills cleaned up. Take care of those places that people like to avoid like the basement and the garage. Use products that will eliminate mold and mildew from your home.
- **Repair all leaks.** If you suspect that your foundation or the beams in your home have gotten wet or damaged, have a professional come out and make sure. Weakened structures are not safe and will cause you to become injured and cause odor in the home.