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Tampa man finds new way to detect mold

Dateline: May 20, 2003 -

Tampa, FL : Being able to pinpoint a mold problem can make the difference between minor work or major demolition, and the newest tool to locate mold isn't high-tech, it's four-legged. A Tampa man is the only person in the country training dogs to locate mold. In a matter of months his business has taken off. His dogs now work for companies all over the U.S. tracking mold more accurately than any human.

A bag of treats and a Jack Russel Terrier named Petie. They're all Bill Whitstine needs to find one of Florida's worst enemies: mold. "We can do 2500 square feet in less than 30 minutes," says Whitstine.

No matter where it is in the house, high or low, Petie will point to it with a high 90-percent accuracy. "Currently without a dog, we take an air sample and say yeah, you have mold but we don't know where it is so we have to tear up the house to find it," says Whitstine.

Petie found a serious mold problem in Cheryl Koon's home. It had made her daughter sick for almost a year. "He alerted and (snap) you know it's there so the insurance company can step in right away and you don't have to wait a month for an air sample," says Koon. She says she saved big money on tests. "Probably thousands."

Whitstine uses a fairly simple tool to train the dogs. He puts six different containers on a wheel, each with a different material in it. One of them has mold. All he does is spin it, and let the dog sniff out the right container. The dog gets rewarded for a positive identification.

Whitstine trains each dog for 1000 hours, eventually moving beyond the wheel. However, before they start working for a company, he spends five full days showing each new handler how to guide the dog through a home. "This is a tool you have to know how to operate," says Whitstine.

Whitstine has trained and sold dogs to several different states. Petie will always stay in Tampa, though. He's the first mold dog Whitstine trained and only the beginning of limitless possibilities. "We're going to continue to surprise and wow the public on what dogs can detect," says Whitstine.

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