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Mold-Sniffing Dogs Eliminate Health Threats

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SAN FRANCISCO -- The eyes can be deceived, but the nose knows.

Especially if those certified noses belong to Putter and Sydney -- two 20-month-old beagles that work for a living detecting health threatening mold in homes and businesses.

The dogs use their talented noses to detect mold that is often hidden under floors and deep within water-damaged walls. Undetected, mold can cause serious health problems, especially in young children, the elderly, those living with immune deficiencies and those with mold allergies.

"They (the dogs) sniff in parts-per-trillion," said Dave Rinderneck, who is a founding partner of California molddogs.com. "So they're able to pick up not only the scent but almost pinpoint the source of mold. They're about 90 percent accurate -- if not more."

If you're skeptical, remember that dogs reliably detect everything from drugs and explosives, to termites and pipe leaks. Though there are fewer than 20 mold dogs in the U.S, they've been used in Europe for 30 years.

Today, they're inspecting a San Francisco townhouse leaking from construction defects. Putter lies down and places her paws on each spot she senses mold. Sydney, meanwhile, barks when he finds a spot. In every case, each dog signaled on the same spots.

"That was impressive," said Terry Ryan, the townhouse owner. "Especially upstairs because the other dog hadn't gone upstairs at all. My suspicion that there might be some mold was borne out."

Inspections take one to two hours and cost \$500 and up but can save homeowners many thousands by eliminating unnecessary repairs.

"It saves on the dollar amount, especially for the insurance companies who pay for a contractor to come in," Rinderneck said.

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With more and more insurance companies limiting or excluding mold coverage from homeowners' policies, the future of dogs like Putter and Sydney looks very rosy.

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