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Meet Quincy, the four-legged mould detector

CAMILLE ROY
STAFF REPORTER

Canada's first mould-detecting dog is saving building owners from a fog of plaster dust.

"Before, we would have had to put a whole room under containment and then physically open up walls to see where the problem is," says Frank Haverkate of indoor environmental testing company, Haverkate and Associates.

Now, Quincy just sits and points at the mouldy spot.

Because dogs have such sensitive noses, they have long been put to work detecting things such as bombs and drugs. Mould may be less exciting but its effects can be devastating. Haverkate, a certified microbial investigator, says Quincy can pinpoint the mould down to a square foot area within walls, floorboards and ceilings.

The 2-year-old yellow Lab is trained to seek out mould and to alert Haverkate by sitting when she finds something. When she sits, Haverkate says, "show me" and Quincy points her nose to the exact location of the mould.

"If she's not able to point her nose right at the spot, if she seems a little confused where it is, it's usually in the ceiling area," Haverkate says.

At that point they go upstairs, where Quincy often finds the spot through the floorboards.

Though she has been working with him for only a month, Haverkate's job is already easier. The conventional methods of mould detection, including visual inspections and hand-held equipment, can't tell exactly where the

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mould is, he says.

Haverkate said customers' reactions to Quincy have been very positive. "A lot of people can't believe that there's such a thing, that there's a mould detection dog."

When he explains that Quincy was trained at a facility for arson and bomb dogs, most people understand a little better.

Quincy was trained at the Florida Canine Academy by owner and certified master trainer Bill Whitstine. He says the dogs' capacity for discrimination is impressive. "They're able to sniff through all the other odours and only look for (mould)."

The dogs train seven days a week for three to four months, Whitstine says. He gets most dogs from the humane society.

A mould dog from the Florida Canine Academy costs about \$19,000, which includes training the owners. "The people are much harder (to train) than the dogs," Whitstine says.

The dogs think of it as a game, he says. "They think we've hidden something in there and they go in to look for it."

Haverkate and Associates charges from \$600 for an assessment to \$1,500 for a more thorough inspection (including lab testing and Quincy's search).

What does Quincy get for her efforts? Doggy treats. "That's what she's working for, that's her paycheck," Haverkate says.

As for risks to Quincy, Whitstine says he did a five-year study with Auburn University in Alabama that found that dogs have an amazing ability to purge toxins from their nasal passages. Still, Haverkate doesn't take any chances with Quincy.

"The dog comes in last and I use my equipment first. If I have to use a respirator, the dog doesn't come in, period."

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