

# Meet the Merchant

Interview by Abbey McDonald amcdonald@dailyastorian.com

In the past two years, Ben Wiscombe's business has pivoted from fighting viruses to battling spores.

He began AXION Clean Mold Remediation in eastern Idaho and spent the early months of the pandemic decontaminating medical facilities and businesses.

Wiscombe's family, and the business, moved to Astoria soon after. He said that as communities lived with the coronavirus longer, demand for professional cleaning declined. He realized that he needed to shift AXION's focus and already had the air purifying tools to do it.

Now, the company works almost exclusively in mold remediation, with locations in Astoria and Hillsboro.

Coast River Business Journal asked Wiscombe for some insight on his work and tips for preventing mold at home. His responses have been edited for brevity and clarity.

**Q: How does the coastal climate impact mold growth?**

**A:** It's just more humid down on the coast and also just generally speaking — because of how close we are to the ocean — we get a lot more rot and decay. It just seems to happen at a faster rate because the moisture just seems to kind of come from all directions. And as a result, I feel like mold is a bigger issue probably on the coast than it is further away from the coast.

**Q: What are some common issues you see in homes and what can people do about it?**

**A:** Mold is fairly simple, as far as the ingredients that are needed to make mold growth. And out where we live, there's a lot of things that are very simple that can be done to minimize the impact of mold or prevent it from growing: Mold needs organic material, which is inevitably everywhere. Organic material is dirt, it's grime, it's dead skin cells. Anything that is derived from the Earth is considered organic. So it's wood, it's even the stuff that Sheetrock's made out of is organic material so it is a very good incubator for mold. So you can't avoid that aspect of it, organic material is everywhere.

It also needs moisture. And again, in the Pacific Northwest, particularly on the coast, there's a lot of moisture just even in the air we live in. So that one is also a little bit more challenging to address. But mold also needs basically stagnation or stagnant air, meaning very low airflow, so if you can allow airflow in a space, that dramatically reduces the ability of mold to grow.

For tenants that are concerned about mold issues, or whether it's just a home that is having a mold issue that keeps recurring, I always give this recommendation: I call it "flush," and it basically means in the mornings, you open windows on a couple sides of your home and you allow air to passively flow through the home for 10 to 15 minutes and close it up and then do the same thing at



Ben Wiscombe is the owner of AXION Clean Mold Remediation.

nighttime before you go to bed. Sometimes it can be concerning with winter time and cold weather, but you're trading really good clean, fresh air for a slightly higher power bill. It's a small price to pay for significantly increased benefits. Air-flow makes a big difference to reduce mold spore spread in a home and just make your air quality improve significantly.

Homes that have HVAC do significantly better. That's not something everyone has, especially in the Pacific Northwest, and because of that it's very easy for stagnation to allow for mold growth in places like closets and just old nooks and corners that air doesn't move very well.

Fans are a simple thing, like if you have a closet or you're seeing some mold growth if you just put a fan there for a couple of days that's going to help move that airflow. Another thing is a dehumidifier. The general rule is that if your home's indoor humidity is above 60%, then you're kind of in an environment where mold can start growing.

**Q: At what point in their mold infestation**

**should people call you?**

**A:** I'm not a medical personnel, but a lot of times people call me when they start having what they feel might be health-related issues in regards to mold. It's usually not the point you want to get to. So the time to address mold is when you see it visibly growing on things. When you need a professional is oftentimes when it's reoccurring. In other words, you've made numerous attempts, like if you see a little bit of mold in your closet on a wall, and it's real light and it's kind of growing maybe on a cardboard box, you can probably address that yourself and it's not a big issue. When you've got a really dark black mold and it's growing right underneath the faucet of your sink, that's when you need to call a professional. There's different types of mold, and obviously no mold is good in high quantities, but there's some molds that even in very low quantities can have the potential to cause a more severe reaction. I think the simplest answer would be if you're experiencing some health issues and you see visible mold growing in your home, you should defi-

## AXION CLEAN MOLD REMEDIATION

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nately have a professional come out and take a look.

**Q: Anything else you want to add?**

**A:** A lot of times I'm happy to do a phone consultation with people. I understand that people aren't made of money, and not everyone has the money to have mold remediation done in their home. A lot of times there's simple things that can be addressed if people have concerns. I honestly probably help 10 to 15 people a week where I helped them avoid having a mold person come out when they were planning on it.

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