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Re-caulking Your Bath

Tired of re-caulking that bathtub every year? If your bath is 15-25 years old, chances are the wallboard behind your tile is either regular drywall or a product called green board. If your bath is 25 years or older, chances are it was built using a "mud set" system. Both of these wall systems are famous for wicking water and holding it causing mold. If, on the other hand, you are fortunate enough to have a newer home, chances are it was built using better products like cement board and fiberglass. These products have mold inhibitors. The number one cause of mold is constant moisture. So, no matter how your bath was built, everyone will face mold if measures to prevent mold are not taken.

Here is one method to remove old caulk and mold. By the way, this same process is acceptable for a sink area and around the base of the tub and toilet.

1. Remove all the old caulking using a 1" putty knife. This may be quite a process. You may also consider using a product known as a caulking softener; you must follow the directions completely with this product. Know what type of tub you have as well. A steel or cast iron tub with a porcelain finish is pretty durable. An acrylic or fiberglass tub can chip very easily and is also susceptible to scratching. Be patient and careful.
2. Once caulk is removed, leave the door open and the fan on for a couple of days, if possible, to allow the room to dry. Many times the wall boarding or concrete backing behind the tile has adsorbed moisture either from the caulk joint failing or from holes in the grouting. Caulking while there is still moisture in the walls will just allow mold to grow again.
3. If the mold was severe, you may even want to wash that area with a good dose of bleach to help kill the mold. In even severe cases, the tile and backing may have to be replaced to get rid of the problem.
4. After the area has dried thoroughly, wipe down the area with rubbing alcohol and allow that to dry.
5. Apply a new layer of caulk. More is not always better; use only the necessary amount. The type of caulk used is less important than the process. You may want to use 100% silicone, although this tends to be very messy. A latex base, which allows you to wipe down the area with a damp rag, will have a nicer appearance. It also washes off the skin much easier. Just make sure you look for caulking that says on the label it is specifically for kitchens and baths.

To prevent mold in the future, here are a few helpful tips:

- Use the fan while showering. This helps minimize steam while showering. Periodically check if your fan is working properly to make sure that it is "drawing" air out of the room.
- After you have showered or bathed, leave the door open to the room and leave the fan on for several hours afterwards. This allows the moisture to evaporate off surfaces so that it does not penetrate. The air will act as a wick and pull the moisture out of the room.
- If your bathroom is in the center of the home and outside air is not an option, you may want to consider painting the walls with a mildew resistant paint. If this is not available, you can also buy an additive to go into the paint to create the same effect.
- You might also want to consider installing a new exhaust fan that works automatically. It senses enough humidity in the air and shuts off when the humidity in the room has reached an acceptable level.
- Replace wet towels and washcloths often.
- Check bath rugs to make sure they are absorbent enough once you get out of the shower. Do not allow water to pool at the base of tubs and showers.
- Keep an eye on the ceiling below and investigate any water spots immediately.
- Replace shower curtains when mold becomes visible.