



Mold found in 'green' building

Sarasota County's "green" sustainability program took one on the chin this past week. The county's administrative Twin Lakes Green Building Complex has mold -- enough to require evacuation of the building, according to County Administrator Jim Ley. Building A, a one-story facility home to 45 parks and recreation, library and other staff, will be evacuated beginning next week.

Renovations could begin by the end of January, according to John McCarthy, general manager for county parks and recreation. Personnel will be moved to various locations, but the parks and recreation reservation office will remain on campus to minimize interruption during peak season, McCarthy said. "Last week we identified who all need to go (and) made arrangements for a firm to come in and work on the building," McCarthy said. "It's a short term move (that) comes at a time where we want to minimize disruption." Nobody has suffered any ill effects from the mold so far, he said. "This is preventive," he said.

Odorous

On Dec. 19 County Administrator Jim Ley informed the Board of County Commissioners via an interoffice memorandum about the mold problem. When staff first sensed an odor, Pure Air Control Services Inc. was brought in for testing, according to Ley's memo. The company found "carpet backing displayed discoloration caused by microbial colonization (mold)" in numerous locations. It "confirm(ed) excessive mold in all locations tested." The condition of the carpets was considered "unmanageable," warranting replacement of the floor. It will study the rest of the building to see if airborne mold is a problem and confirm the mold hasn't made its way into the walls.

Setback?

County Commissioner Shannon Staub is one of 10 county commissioners nationally to serve on the Green Government Initiative advisory board, a National Association of Counties program that helps counties throughout the country develop and implement environmentally sustainable programs and practices. She took the news in stride. "These things happen, and we will do our best to fix the problem," Staub said. "It seems to me that this is a pretty unusual case ... with the past history of being built on a marsh area by the private sector, then us renovating it and trying the underground drainage that was suggested," Staub said. "We tried to fix the issue ... but didn't get the underground drainage to work." While the development is unfortunate, Staub doesn't see it hindering green building efforts. "I don't think this will affect our future plans to build and renovate to the green standards. Green building is the only way to build and renovate for future sustainability. That hasn't changed," she said.

LEED

Building A was originally built in 1970 on a marsh by the Kansas City Royals baseball team and used as a dormitory for players. The county came into ownership of the building when took over the facility and created Twin Lakes Park, converting it into an administrative office. The U.S. Green Building Council awarded the complex (which consists of the newer solar-powered, 8,300-square-foot Building B and the renovated, 19,250-square-foot Building A) its prestigious gold-level Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification in 2005. The designation recognizes buildings and grounds that are "environmentally responsible, profitable and healthy places to live and work."

Problem resurfaces

The county first discovered mold in 2003 when it decided to renovate the building while at the same time building the new, adjacent green office building. It hired Ardaman Associates to assess the situation. Ardaman determined the problem existed because the building was originally constructed on "unsuitable soil." The county eventually hired an architectural firm to design a perimeter drainage system to eliminate moisture intrusion. According to Ley, it was the only cost-effective solution. The architect/contractor, however, would not guarantee the drainage system would solve the problem. With the only alternative being to tear the building down, the county decided to move forward with the drainage project. In November Gov. Charlie Crist went on an environmentally friendly building tour throughout Florida, stopping off in Sarasota County to recognize efforts here. The complex on Clark Road in Sarasota houses administrative offices for Sarasota County Community Services, which includes libraries, parks and recreation, the History Center and the University of Florida-Sarasota County Extension Service.

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