

Mold In Cars Can Be Dangerous To Health

Musty Smell From Air Conditioner Is Clue To Mold

Tracy Davidson, NBC 10 Consumer Reporter

POSTED: 4:08 p.m. EDT October 22, 2003

Water leaks in your car can cause more than just wet carpets -- they can lead to mold and make you sick.

Consumer Alert spoke to car owners who had serious problems.

"He took the whole HVAC (heating, ventilating and air-conditioning) system apart and cleaned it all out and put deodorizer in it and the problem with that was I was getting deodorizer blown in my face and when that wore off and we had another big rain, here we go again," explained Shari McAvoy, a consumer.

For McAvoy, an annoying musty smell soon caused health problems. She has been hospitalized twice and she blames it on the mold that permeates her car's air conditioning system. Consumer attorney Craig Kimmel says a little bit of dampness might be the first sign of a serious problem.

"You want to make sure if you're in the car, let's say the morning after a big rain, and it seems like there's a lot of moisture in the air inside the car, maybe you can't get the window clear from the defroster, or maybe it feels very musty. That's something you want to pay attention to because that could also indicate there's water intrusion in the vehicle," Kimmel said.

Delores Talbert noticed some water in her car and took it back to the dealership to be checked out. She said they found a lot of water.

"They supposedly changed the seals around the doors. They said it was leaking in the trunk, they said it was leaking in the taillight, it was leaking in numerous places," Talbert said.

Kimmel said those leaks often come from damaged or improperly installed rubber seals. Before you buy a car, take a careful look at the way the seals fit.

"If it is deformed in some way, it's pinched, it's turned up when it should be turned down, it's not following the contours of the gutter area -- that's a good indicator that particular car may have problems in the future with water leakage," Kimmel explained.

Here are some other things to look for:

- Check the weatherstripping around the trunk, windows and sunroof. If it looks uneven, that's where the leak could be.

- If you detect a musty odor when you turn on your air conditioning or heater, take the car to the dealer and have the air system checked thoroughly.

For more tips on what to do if you have a water leak in your car, go to Kimmel's Web site at www.lemonlaw.com.