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Ever rush from the airport after a long flight, hail a taxi, attend a long and grueling business meeting, finally check into your hotel, and then find you cannot unwind due to an overpowering **musty odor** in your room? Musty odors are not specific to hotels but are common in many types of indoor spaces. Also, while musty odors in indoor spaces are more prevalent in some geographic areas over others (humid areas versus dry areas), they occur in all geographic regions. But where do they come from, and what should you do about them?

**Source: *What Causes Musty Odors?***

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) emanate from many sources (e.g., microbes, solvents, paints, cleaners, tobacco smoke) and can cause various odors in the indoor environment. Of the various odors, musty odors are very common and are a byproduct of mold growth. These are referred to specifically as microbial volatile organic compounds (MVOC's). "Molds generate various mixtures of VOCs depending on the species of fungi present and the amount of water and kind of substrate available. These VOCs may include alcohols, esters, aldehydes, and aromatic compounds. Very low concentrations of these VOCs can cause the characteristic 'musty' odors..." and are often reported as a nuisance. (Guidance for Clinicians, 2004)

**VOCs: *How much is too much?***

Since low concentrations of VOCs can cause musty odors, then a higher buildup of concentrations in a small space is certainly a concern. Conditions that contribute to a buildup of VOCs and associated musty odors within a guestroom are: inadequate fresh air delivered to the guest room, used laundry, irregular filter replacement, and inadequate exhaust air in the guest room toilets. All of these issues can promote increased levels of humidity and microbial growth (contributing factors to MVOC's) in your building, thereby creating an indoor environment conducive to musty odors.

**Take Action: *What you can do!***

So what do you do if these smells arise? Two scenarios are very common:

- Often hotel guestrooms are offline for a number of days and weeks resulting in a temporary musty smell. In these cases, you should freshen up the room as needed before checking guests in. Schedule room service to double check the cleanliness of the room and have them turn on the HVAC system to bring the room up to comfort conditions. This will help to remove any temporary odors.
- If there is a persistent smell, then you should inspect the room for visual mold and inspect the fresh air and exhaust systems for the guestroom to verify they are providing adequate ventilation for dilution of

any VOCs. Moisture control is very important in eliminating musty odors in your building.

If mold growth is identified in your building, remediation is recommended and should be managed closely. Gobbell Hays Partners, Inc. has extensive experience in the various disciplines for effective detection of VOC sources as well as the resulting remediation management. For more information on what GHP can do to examine and eliminate your musty odors, you can contact [Casey Hester, PE, LEED AP](#) in our Nashville office at 615-254-8500 or [Ken Garza](#) in our San Antonio office at 210-824-5600. You can also visit our [GHP website](#) for further information and project experience.

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