AfterWords
A NEWSLETTER FROM AFTERDISASTER® THE WATER AND FIRE EMERGENCY TEAM

IT'S POLLEN TIME!

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What is it?

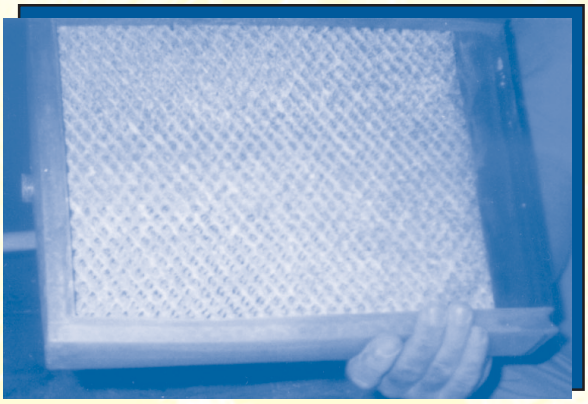
Pollen is a key element in the reproduction of trees, flowers, grasses and weeds. The pollen grain is the structure that transports the male DNA to the female part of a flower. It must be strong to protect the contents and usually has several layers. The grains are microscopic, usually 15-100 microns in size.

Most flowering plants produce sticky pollen that adheres to insects who then transfer pollen to more flowers for reproduction. Grasses, trees and weeds, on the other hand, rely more on breezes for pollination and therefore produce more grains of pollen. A single ragweed plant can produce over 1,000,000 grains in one day! Once airborne, some pollen has been found as high as 2 miles up in the atmosphere and to 400 miles out to sea.

What are the effects of pollen?

As beneficial as pollen is to the reproduction of plants, it can pose problems to man. Each year more and more cases of allergies, hay fever, and asthma triggered by pollen are reported. Sometimes it is very difficult to identify which pollen is triggering the symptoms because so many different plants are producing pollen at the same time, especially in the spring. Generally, flowers do not give much trouble. Weeds are the major producers of pollen with ragweed as the number one culprit. Grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass, Johnson grass, Bermuda grass, etc. affect as many as 95% of all hay fever sufferers. Trees such as oak, pecan, elm, ash, hickory, mountain cedar, box elder, etc. also are known contributors to our misery.

Another obvious problem from pollen is the dusty appearance on the surfaces it coats. When it settles onto a surface, it may slide off a slick dry finish, but stick to rougher, damper, dull finishes. It collects in cracks, pores and scratches in the surface. If not removed quickly, the pollen may collect moisture or mix with other residues, enabling it to stain, etch, erode or bond with the surface material and below.



HVAC filter contaminated by excessive pollen.

How do I treat pollen residue?

Removing pollen is a cleaning process. Neutral to slightly alkaline cleaning solutions usually work best, but pre-test in inconspicuous areas to check results. Because the grains become airborne when disturbed in cleaning, caution against cross-contamination during cleaning inside must be exercised through air scrubbers or negative air machines with HEPA *(High Efficiency Particulate Air)* filtration. Sometimes, physical barriers must be used for containment. Workers should limit their exposure by proper personal protective equipment *(respirators, gloves, eye protection, etc.)*

During periods of heavy pollen, it may be necessary to change Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning *(HVAC)* filters more often. Higher filtration filters *(such as HEPA filters)* are advised to trap more pollen. The entire HVAC system should be inspected to insure pollen is not causing internal problems. If it is, the entire system may need cleaning.

Most environments ***AFTERDISASTER®*** is called upon to restore to "pre-loss" condition involve damage sources that can be eliminated, controlled or prevented in the future *(i.e., fire, water, sewage, mold, etc.)*. But pollen naturally reoccurs, therefore containment, cleaning and/or exposure avoidance are more realistic approaches. Most situations involve sources not on our own property and therefore difficult, if not impossible, to control or eliminate. To help us better prepare, weather forecasts during plant growing seasons often include area predictions for pollen conditions. Using this information alerts us to increase containment, cleaning and exposure avoidance.

AFTERDISASTER® has an Indoor Air Quality Division specializing in cleaning and remediating HVAC systems. If you are experiencing poor indoor air quality related to pollen, call your local ***AFTERDISASTER®*** Business Center today. You make the call, we'll do the rest!