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Fungus, Molds, and Mushrooms

Nuisance molds are not uncommon in wood fiber and wood mulch products. Wood decomposition occurs primarily between 35 and 100 degrees F, and when moisture content is between 35% and 95%. Fungus is natural microscopic elements involved in the decomposition. Sometimes, fungi may develop visible reproductive structures. Despite the research that has already been conducted, a surefire solution to prevent visible fungus structures from forming has not been found yet.

Nuisance molds are most often found to occur following wet weather in temperatures above 35 degrees F. When the wood is wet, bacteria rapidly colonizes and the fungi feed on this bacteria which may lead to slime molds, mushrooms, etc. Once the wood dries out, the slime molds gradually go away as the bacteria, the fungus is feeding on, begins to diminish. If the area has good drainage and receives direct sunlight, the surface will normally dry out before fungus becomes visible. Heavy rain or extended periods of rain along with mild weather are prime conditions for fungus to grow.

There are no known health hazards associated with these fungi unless they are eaten, but it is a good idea to remove them especially in areas where children have access. Short-term solutions are to scoop out and dispose of the fungus. Then, if desired, a mixture of one part liquid laundry detergent to three parts water can be poured or sprayed on the surface to kill the bacteria the fungus is feeding on. If the fungus persists, granulated or powdered lime (limestone) can be spread over the area. Lightly rake the surface.

When building a new play area, install an adequate drainage system and locate the area so that the surface will receive direct sunlight. Even if the area has an excellent drain system, if the surface remains shaded, it may never really dry out which will lead to faster decomposition and frequent mold or fungus problems. Since climates vary from region to region and year to year, and playground usage varies, each playground site needs to be evaluated for its specific conditions when determining what proper drainage is and what rate of decomposition can be expected given the climate, usage, etc.

Outdoor products like WOODCARPET ® can be affected by extreme weather conditions. However, WOODCARPET ® is an environmentally friendly product that provides many important benefits such as fall safety and accessibility.

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