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Attack of the Killer Christmas Trees!!

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As the Christmas season rolls around, studies have shown that pocket books get lighter and lighter, and the consumer's bank accounts dwindle. Since I have used the words "Studies have shown..." then it must be true, right? After all "...studies have shown..."

Last Sunday, December 14, 2014, a web site called "IAQ TV" released a nonsensical junk science video on "Christmas Tree Syndrome." According to IAQ TV web site, Cochran and Associates, is the company behind the IAQ Video Network.

The video and the press release falsely and inaccurately claim:

"A study published in the Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology found that the introduction of a Christmas tree could dramatically increase airborne mold spores, a known allergen and asthma trigger, over time."

In fact, it would appear no such study exists, and the claim by IAQ TV has been fabricated out of thin air. The authors of the video provide no citation to the supposed "study" and a search through the Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology reveals no such "study." It would seem IAQ TV has merely fabricated the information.

Having searched the AAI for the revealing study, we do find a very short letter by Kurlandsky, Przepiora, et al titled "Identification of mold on seasonal indoor coniferous trees" (Vol. 106, Issue 6, p543-544, April 13, 2011). Is this the study?

The authors of that very short letter merely announce an informal "study" they conducted that was intended to survey the variety of moulds that could be isolated from live Christmas trees that resided in homes during the Christmas season.

The authors never made any attempt to enumerate or estimate or study indoor spore concentrations and absolutely never concluded that "...a Christmas tree could dramatically increase airborne mold spores..." This is all simply a fabrication by Cochran and Associates, the authors of the video who apparently never bothered to perform any kind of fact checking and apparently never read the AAI publication.

In reality, the authors of the AAI letter state: "*The sole 1970 investigation of Christmas tree allergy concluded that aerosolized ragweed, grass, and tree pollen on the tree bark or oleoresin were likely causes.*" They then reference an unpublished 2007 paper wherein an individual (in an undisclosed manner) measured the spore concentrations in a single apartment that apparently had a live Christmas tree and that author apparently found a

marginal increase in airborne mould spores, similar to (or actually lower than) that one may find if they open their window on a nice spring day.

The abuse of “studies” and falsification of the findings of those “studies” is rampant in the popular press. Those fabrications get circulated and recirculated on the internet until they become “known facts” – but falsehoods nonetheless. Some time ago I addressed this issue in an interview in ComputerEdge: “Does Repetition on the Internet Make It True?” (<http://webserver.computoredge.com/online.mvc?zone=NA&article=in1&issue=3110>)

Now, undoubtedly the “Certified” mould crowd will get all excited about a new opportunity to frighten residents about the dangers lurking in their Christmas tree and thus the opportunity to perform their bogus “air sampling.” This, in turn, will increase the probability that some “journalist” will pick up on this new “Christmas Tree Syndrome” study as published in Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology ...

And the whole thing becomes a tempest in a tea pot, just because some irresponsible pot-bangers make noise on the internet.

Now, don’t get me wrong – I want to take a short vacation this winter to the Bahamas and I need the money. As such, I recommend that Health Professionals in North America run around and frighten as many people as they can with this nonsense about this new emerging (but nonexistent) problem of “Christmas Tree Syndrome” so that I can sell my services debunking the junk science of the proponents of the same, and charge an exorbitant fee for my time.

The worst part about all this is, of course, that it will give my dear friend, Ed Light (Building Dynamics, Inc.) an opportunity to write a new fungus song to the tune of “O Tannenbaum” which he will mercilessly sing with delight.

Representatives of the North American Coalition of Christmas Tree Growers are encouraged to beat a path to my front door to save their industry from this latest rash of silliness– (please bring cash).

