

Mildew Treatment

Mildew The Curse of the Camper

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Introduction

Because of the number of requests I have had. I have written this article to assist the camper to understand why mildew occurs and how to go about rectifying.

Mildew

Mildew is a spore just like mushrooms. It occurs when items are left in a damp condition for a period of time. If a tent that has been used and rolled up whilst there is still dampness in the fabric, then without the tent being sunned and made 100% dry before storage, this problem can occur.

Camper vans with pop-up tops and awnings are also units that are known to suffer as they can go for long periods where the tops or awnings have not been put up and the seal allowed ingress of water.

Camper trailers are another piece of equipment where care needs to be taken, ensuring a thorough drying before storage. Where they are stored outside for long periods without use, its not a bad idea to have an extra cover over the unit in case the cover leaks. Make sure there is an air gap between the two covers. It only takes only a small amount of moisture to ingress into the unit to have the problem manifest.

If the moisture is present, and the equipment has not been allowed to dry, the result is that the dreaded lurgie(mildew) can get a hold on the canvas. Mildew is deleterious to fabric as if left in an active condition it will eventually rot the material. This is why you must treat and kill the spores as soon as it is detected. Regular checks of equipment can eliminate this risk. I have seen all stages of the damage that can be done from mild cases to where the tent has fallen to pieces. So take this as a warning of what damage can be done.

Prevention

There are a number of things that can be done to stop mildew from forming.

First, do not presume the tent is dry when you take it down when packing up at the camp site. In most cases there will be a small amount of moisture somewhere in a seam or the floor and this requires to be completely removed prior to storage. We had a large hire section of canvas tents in the past, and when returned from hire these would be always be baked in the sun, turned inside out, cleaned and checked for damage. Once this had been carried out we knew with confidence that no matter how long the tents were stored they would be ready to go when required.

Another thing that can be done even through winter on a fine day, pop the top on the camper van or put up the camper trailer and get the sun on it.

At this stage I am going to advise you, not to lend your equipment to anyone. I have seen and had to repair tents that were loaned to so called friends or relatives and had been returned with damage done and nothing said. There is also the very familiar statement given on the return of the equipment, "Oh yes, the tent has been cleaned and is bone dry". If you have been fool hardy and lent your equipment, do not take their word, for they are not going to worry if you don't check it. Pull the tent out and check it yourself, because if you don't, when pulled out six months later and you open the top of the bag and it smells like a mushroom farm, you then know what you should have done, checked it! Now it has the dreaded lurgie - mildew. I could keep going with these disaster stories but I think you get the drift.

Tents, and for that matter all equipment no matter what type must be 100% bone dry before putting away in storage. As I stated before with all our hire tents and with our own personal equipment, on return, we would sun them for a number of hours to get all the moisture out of the material. If on return from camping, the tent is wet, don't leave it in its bag, get it out and hang it in the car port or garage and let the air get through it, or put it up in the garden. It is surprising how dry you can get them this way... It does not matter if it gets wet again, it will dry eventually. When storing equipment, put equipment on shelving rather than on concrete floors. While they have air-circulating through the equipment mildew won't start.

If by chance your canvas equipment does get mildew into it **do not use soap or detergent** to have a go at removing it. There are special chemicals that are used to remove the mildew if it has not gone too far. Soap and detergents are wetting agents and once into the fabric are very hard to remove and the reproofing process has a tendency of not sealing the material.

Treatment

If you have mildew in your equipment, the question is how bad is it???

Take the material between the thumb and fore finger and pull on the material lightly.

If it parts the material will have to be replaced but the mildew will have to be killed first.

The affected area will have to be replaced. Repairers will not take a tent that has untreated mildew as they do not want to infest their work area with the spores of the mildew.

If the material does not part then there is a chance that you can rescue the tent/camper. The mildew will have to be treated and then the tent re-proofed as the mildew remover also removes the proofing. When doing the job wear old clothes as you will get wet.

You will need

Mildew Remover like Mould Rid (Diluted White King bleach could also be used)

Canvas Re-proofing liquid like Bradproof, COI Aqua Proof or Joseph Lyddy products

Dust pan brush (to get into corners and seams)

Kitchen Broom (It's a long handle paint brush)

Paint Roller Tray for the chemicals being used (I find this is the best tray to use)



- Put the tent up but pick a fine day
- Have a look at the area of infection and
- Work out how much the area in square metres. You will need 1 litre of liquid per 5 square metres of surface area.
- Do not dilute the liquids unless instruction so indicate. Test an area as the treatment could cause a variation in colour.
- Paint on the mildew removing liquid inside and out (I find a brush/broom is the best for applying as it works into the fabric where a roller leaves untreated areas)
- Wait till the tent is dry and leave for at least another 2 hours
- Hose off until water is clear
- Some areas might need a repeat if mildew staining persists.
- Once the mildew removal has been completed wait till tent is dry before re-proofing.
- Once the tent is dry re-proof the whole tent not just the part treated as splashing from the mildew remover could have removed the proofing and you want the tent to be able to keep the rain out.

Note

In some cases the stain from the mildew will not be completely removed The mildew remover can cause variations in colour but this is better than the mildew.

If you do need to use these instructions good luck, however I hope that you never need to use them.

If you need further advice or any of these chemicals they are available from
All Camping Supplies 02 9481 0473

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