

jeff Charlton writes Free app to Tackle Confusion Over Mould Testing

Free Building Forensics app reviews home conditions, symptoms and testing needs before identifying suitable sampling, analysis and includes research pathways.

BECKENHAM, KENT, UNITED KINGDOM, August 16, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- BECKENHAM,

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*Jeff Charlton, Founder,
Building Forensics*

UNITED KINGDOM — Homeowners and tenants concerned about mould and bacteria face a confusing choice of air samples, surface tests, dust analysis, microbial DNA methods and laboratory packages, often with little independent guidance explaining which method answers which question.

Choosing an unsuitable test may waste money, overlook a relevant contamination reservoir or produce results that cannot answer whether remediation has been successful. A negative short-duration air sample, for example, does not necessarily exclude concealed, settled or intermittent contamination.

Environmental hygienist [Jeff Charlton](#) and [Building Forensics](#) have expanded the free [TRACE](#) application to help users review conditions within their home before identifying potentially appropriate sampling, analysis and research pathways.

TRACE starts with the user’s actual concern—not the test they initially think they need. It considers property and occupant information including:

- Dampness, condensation, leaks and previous water damage
- Visible or suspected concealed mould
- Unusual or persistent odours
- Ventilation and indoor environmental conditions
- Sewage or bacterial contamination concerns
- Previous cleaning, decontamination or remediation
- Continuing concerns following remedial work
- Reported physical symptoms and whether they change between environments
- Pets, animal bedding, houseplants and other possible microbial reservoirs

TRACE then provides a structured route towards potentially suitable sampling methods, analytical options and sample locations. It explains the different purposes, strengths and limitations of air sampling, surface swabs, tape lifts, settled-dust analysis, microbial DNA testing and other methods.

“People frequently buy a test before defining the question. TRACE reverses that process by identifying the concern first and then explaining which method may provide useful evidence,” said Jeff Charlton, founder of Building Forensics.

Helping users make better-informed testing decisions

TRACE is designed to help users:

- Avoid purchasing a test that cannot answer their principal question
- Distinguish between air, surface, dust and microbial DNA methods
- Identify locations and materials that may require investigation
- Examine possible mould and bacterial contamination
- Plan sampling following water damage or remediation
- Consider whether post-remediation verification requires more than a visual inspection
- Prepare informed questions for laboratories, surveyors and remediation contractors
- Recognise when professional investigation is more appropriate than DIY testing

TRACE does not present any single test as the answer to every situation. Instead, it helps users identify sampling and analysis methods suited to their circumstances and the decision they need to make.

New research-support pathways

The updated application also introduces structured research-support pathways for questions that conventional property testing may not fully resolve.

These pathways allow users and participating professionals to consider:

- The timing of physical symptoms in relation to water damage, visible mould, odours, occupancy or remediation
- Whether reported symptoms change when the individual enters or leaves a particular environment
- Oral and sinonasal sampling where microbial investigation may be clinically appropriate
- Targeted swabs from defined oral sites and broader saliva-based microbiome analysis as different, non-interchangeable methods
- Animal bedding, cages, litter trays and frequently contacted surfaces
- Houseplants, potting media, containers and associated moisture reservoirs

- Environmental results alongside property history and reported exposure concerns
- Alternative sampling methods where earlier testing did not answer the original question

A saliva sample, targeted oral swab, environmental surface swab and settled-dust sample provide different forms of information. TRACE explains these distinctions so that users can discuss appropriate options with laboratories, environmental professionals and, where relevant, healthcare practitioners.

The application provides environmental decision-support information and does not diagnose illness, prescribe treatment or prove that a building caused an individual's symptoms. Reviewing symptoms may reveal patterns that warrant further investigation, but medical assessment and interpretation remain the responsibility of appropriately qualified healthcare professionals.

TRACE may also assist post-remediation verification by helping users identify the question that clearance testing must answer, the areas that may require assessment and the limitations of relying on one method alone.

The need for careful test selection is supported by public-health guidance. The US Environmental Protection Agency states that sampling is generally unnecessary where visible mould is present and confirms that no federal limits have been established for mould or mould spores. The US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health warns that short-duration air samples may not represent actual exposure and do not capture the full range of agents associated with damp buildings.

Developed from Jeff Charlton's more than three decades of environmental investigation and contamination experience, TRACE brings together home conditions, occupant concerns, sampling decisions and additional research pathways in one accessible application.

TRACE is available through the Building Forensics application collection:

<https://shop.buildingforensics.co.uk/collections/apps>

Supporting information:

US Environmental Protection Agency — Mold Testing or Sampling:

<https://www.epa.gov/mold/mold-testing-or-sampling>

CDC/NIOSH — Mold, Testing and Remediation:

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/mold/testing-remediation/index.html>

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