LIVING SPACES

Damp, Condensation and Mould

This booklet gives some basic information about the different types of dampness that may affect the property you live in.

Condensation is probably the biggest cause of dampness in properties. Information and advice are included within this booklet to help you identify and reduce condensation as well as treating the mould growth often associated with it.

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Warmth versus Ventilation

Striking the right balance between warmth and ventilation is important and can be very effective.

By opening windows or ventilating the property it may appear that you are losing some heat, but what you are actually doing is allowing warm, moisture-laden air to escape and permitting cool, dry air to enter the property. Dry cool air is actually cheaper to heat than warm moist air.

Many people who have double glazing installed experience problems with condensation and mould growth that they never had with their old draughty windows. This is because all the natural draughts around the poorly fitted windows have been sealed. However, by using trickle vents, opening windows slightly or allowing your extractor fan to do its job, then the necessary ventilation can be achieved.

Please note…

The advice is to ventilate for an appropriate period of time, not to leave windows open all day. Be careful not to 'over ventilate' the property when it is cold, as it will cause the temperature inside to drop and make condensation more likely. It will also increase your heating costs.

Types of Dampness

There are four main types of dampness that could affect the property. It is important to understand the difference between them so that you know what to do about the problem.

Rising Damp

This is caused by water rising from the ground into the property. The water gets through a broken damp proof course (DPC) or passes through the natural brickwork if the property was built with a DPC. A DPC is a horizontal layer of waterproof material put in walls or a building just above ground level to stop water rising through the walls by capillary action. Rising damp will be present all year round but is more noticeable in the winter. If left untreated it may cause the wall plaster to crumble and wallpaper to lift in the affected area.

Rising damp will only affect ground floor rooms. It will not normally rise higher than 12-24 inches above ground level (300mm to 600mm) and usually leaves a 'tide mark' low down on the wall. You might also notice white salts on the affected areas.

Note: Black mould will rarely be seen where there is rising damp (and then only in the early stages). This is because dampness carries ground salts with it which prevent the growth of black mould.

Photo examples of rising damp:

Penetrating Damp

This type of dampness will only be found on external walls or in the case of roof leaks, on ceilings.

It appears because of a defect outside the property, such as missing pointing to brickwork, cracked render or missing roof tiles. These faults then allow water to pass from outside to inner surfaces.

Penetrating dampness is far more noticeable following a period of rainfall and will normally appear as a well-defined ‘damp patch’ that looks and feels damp to touch.

Note: Black mould is rarely seen on areas of penetrating dampness. This is because the affected area is usually too wet and the dampness contains salts picked up when passing through the wall, which prevent the growth of black mould.

Photo examples of penetrating dampness:

Defective Plumbing

Leaks from water and waste pipes, especially in bathrooms and kitchens, are relatively common. They can affect both external and internal walls and ceilings.

The affected area looks and feels damp to touch and remains damp whatever the weather conditions are outside. A quick check of the water and waste pipes serving the kitchen and bathroom and the seals around the bath, shower and sinks, plus external pipework, such as guttering will usually identify the source of the problem.

Note: Black mould will rarely be seen on this type of dampness because the area is usually too wet and the chemicals in a waste water leak will prevent mould growth.

Photo examples of defective plumbing:

Condensation

This is by far the most common cause of dampness experienced by tenants, resulting in a large number of enquiries or reports to Living Spaces.

Condensation is caused by water vapour or moisture from inside the property coming into contact with a colder surface, such as a window or wall. The water drops (condensation) which form may then soak into wallpaper, paintwork or even plaster work. In time, the affected damp areas then attract black mould that grows on its surface.

Condensation mainly occurs during colder months, whether it's rainy or dry outside. It is usually found in the corners of rooms, north facing walls and on or near windows. It is also found in areas of little air circulation such as behind wardrobes and beds, especially where they are pushed up against external walls.

Note: Black mould is frequently seen on this type of dampness.

Photo examples of condensation:

What to do if you think the property is suffering from any of these…

Symptoms	Likely Cause	Next Steps
Tide marks on walls approximately 12-24 inches above the ground, possibly showing signs of white salts	Rising damp	Report it to Living Spaces
Damp patch on external wall or ceiling, worsening or re-appearing during wet weather	Penetrating damp	Report it to Living Spaces
Damp patch on internal or external wall or ceiling, that remains damp whatever the weather conditions are	Defective plumbing	If appropriate, turn the water off at the stopcock as soon as possible and report it to Living Spaces (stopcock location noted in inventory)
Black mould appearing in corners of rooms, around windows or behind wardrobes and beds	Condensation	Further information provided in booklet

Condensation and Mould Growth

Most properties will be affected by condensation at some point. However certain activities can increase the problem.

In both owner occupier and rental properties condensation and mould growth are often due to habits and lifestyle and is something that can be reduced or remedied by the occupant.

Cooking, washing, drying clothes indoors, even breathing – all produce water vapour that can only be seen when tiny drops of water (condensation) appear on colder surfaces such as walls, windows, ceilings or mirrors.

The 'amount' of condensation in a property depends upon three factors:

- How much water vapour is produced by the actions of you and your family
- How cold or warm the property is
- How much air circulation (ventilation) there is in the property

Simply turning up the heating will not sort out the problem, this may only temporarily reduce condensation. All three factors may need to be looked at to reduce the problem.

The first sign of a problem is water vapour condensing on windows and other cold surfaces, which then take a long time to disappear, allowing surfaces to become damp. The second indication is black mould patches growing on these damp areas.

Black Mould

Mould spores are invisible to the human eye and are always present in the atmosphere both inside and outside properties.

They only become noticeable when they land on a surface upon which they can grow and then multiply.

For mould to thrive and survive, it requires four elements:

Moisture: Obtained from condensation

Food: Wallpaper, paint or plaster

Suitable temperature: Courtesy of you

Oxygen: Courtesy of Mother Nature

Five steps to reducing condensation and black mould growth…

This five-step plan can help to reduce the amount of condensation and black mould growth in the property.

1. Produce Less Moisture

Ordinarily daily activities produce a lot of moisture (see page 9). To reduce this:

- Dry clothes outdoors (where possible). Avoid drying clothes indoors or if you have to, dry them on a clothes airer in the bathroom with the door closed and either an extractor fan on or a window slightly open.
- Vent tumble driers to the outside (never into the property), unless it is a self-condensing type.
- Cover pans when cooking and do not leave kettles boiling.
- Do not use paraffin or liquid petroleum (bottled) gas heaters. They produce large amounts of water vapour and are very expensive to run.
- Always keep tropical fish tanks covered. Water evaporation from tanks can be severe.
- Try not to let pets sleep in your bedroom.
- If possible, take a shower rather than a bath, this produces less moisture and saves money.

2. Remove Excess Moisture

Always wipe the windows and window sills in the property every morning to remove condensation. This is especially important in the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen – just opening the window is not enough.

3. Ventilate to Remove Moisture

It is important to remove condensation and excess moisture by ventilating rooms. You can ventilate a room without making draughts or causing the room to be cold.

To do this you may only need to open the window slightly or use the trickle vent which will often be found on UPVC windows. This allows warm (but moist) air to escape to the outside and let in cool (but dry) air.

- Always ventilate or open a window when using the kitchen or bathroom and close the doors to prevent moisture in the air from spreading to other parts of the property. Continue to ventilate these rooms for a short period of time after a shower, bath or cooking and keep the doors closed.
- If you have extractor fans fitted allow them to do their job by leaving them on at all times and using the boost control (where possible) when you are cooking or bathing. The fans are extremely cheap to run and are really effective in extracting moisture.
- Open bedroom windows for at least one hour and leave sheets/bedding back from the mattress to air it out.
- Clear window sills of clutter that will restrict opening the window.
- Leave space between the back of the furniture and cold walls.
- Ventilate cupboards, wardrobes and avoid overfilling them as this prevents air circulating.
- Do not block air vents and make sure you meet ventilation requirements for any heating appliances in a room.

4. Slightly Increase the Heat in the Property

In cold weather, the best way to keep rooms warm and avoid condensation is to keep low background heat on all day rather than short bursts of high heat when you are in the property.

Heating controls on your radiators, room thermostats and a timer will help control the heating throughout the property and manage costs.

5. Dealing with Black Mould

Black mould can grow on walls, ceilings, furnishings and even on clothes and toys, which can be expensive to replace.

To kill and remove mould follow the below steps:

- Carefully remove excess mould with a damp cloth and throw away after. **Do not** brush mould or use a vacuum cleaner as this releases spores into the air.
- Wipe down affected areas using a fungicidal wash that carries a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) approval number or diluted bleach which can be bought at most supermarkets – **remember** always use rubber gloves and wear safety glasses. A simple saline solution, that can be made by pouring salt into boiling water until it has dissolved, also does the same job.
- Tea Tree oil is a natural antiseptic and disinfectant but it's also great for cleaning, especially on mould or mildew. Try a dilute of 3-4 drops of Tea Tree oil in 2 litres of water (hot or cold). Soak mildewed items in the solution or spray onto trouble spots using a spray bottle. Wipe, then rinse off. Always ensure you carry out a test on a small area of fabric/material/surface beforehand.
- After treatment, redecorate using a fungicidal paint or wallpaper paste – do not paint over using an ordinary paint.
- Dry clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets.

Common Household Moisture Producing Activities

Our everyday activities add extra moisture to the air inside the property – breathing even adds some moisture.

One person asleep adds half a pint of water to the air overnight and an active person adds twice that rate during the day.

The illustration below gives you some idea of how much extra water you could be adding to the air in the property in a day:

- A bath or shower
- Washing dishes
- Two people at home for 16 hours
- Bottled gas heater
- Cooking and use of kettle
- Drying clothes indoors