Dealing with damp and condensation

During the colder months, condensation becomes a major problem in many homes. It is caused when warm, moist air hits a cold surface such as a window or external wall and condenses, running down the cold surface as water droplets. If left, this can develop into black mould which looks and smells bad and can cause health problems as well as thousands of pounds worth of damage to clothes, furniture, books, shoes and decorations.

Condensation can be a problem in any property no matter its age. It is often worse in homes that have been modernised as ventilation and the circulation of air is reduced. Controlling ventilation and air circulation around the home is very important in the prevention of condensation because this allows moisture-filled air to escape to the outside, preventing future problems inside your home.

Rising or penetrating damp can cause problems in your home although it is less common than condensation.

What is penetrating damp?

Penetrating damp is classed as any water that finds its way inside from the outside. It can occur at all levels of the building and is usually higher up. Overflowing gutters, missing roof tiles, leaking pipes and downspouts, badly fitting windows/doors and damaged pointing, cladding or flashing or render as well as covered air bricks can all be a source of penetrating damp.

What is rising damp?

Rising damp is caused by a failed or 'bridged' damp proof course. This allows moisture in the ground to rise up through the ground floor walls of your home, sometimes to a height of one metre. You can usually identify rising damp because it is often associated with a tide mark at the edge of the area of damp caused by salt deposits.

Did you know?

- A family of four can add moisture to the air equivalent to 30 or 40 litres of water a week just by breathing.
- Showering, cooking, bathing and washing can add 15 to 20 litres of water a week.
- Drying clothes indoors can add 10 to 15 litres a week.

Typical signs

Growing areas of damp on walls or ceilings

Drips and puddles

Blotchy patches on walls

Signs of spores and mildew

Wet and crumbly plaster

If you think damp is causing a problem in your property, you will need to seek advice as to what is causing it and how it can be fixed.

Condensation

Condensation can cause mould to form in your home, leading to staining/damaging wallpaper, wall surfaces, window frames, furniture and clothing.

The mould and its spores carry the smell that is often associated with a damp house. Black mould can't grow where salt deposits are present (as with rising damp) and is therefore a sign of condensation.

Water vapour is generated in your home in many ways but the main causes are:

Baths and showers

Steam from cooking and boiling the kettle

Drying clothes indoors

Unsuitable venting of tumble dryers

The best way to deal with mould is to remove it from walls using a special fungicidal wash which should be in line with the manufacturer's instructions. Special paints are also available that will also delay the mould, but unless you take the steps to reduce condensation it will eventually grow back.

Areas prone to condensation

- Cold surfaces such as mirrors, windows and window frames.
- External walls, walls of unheated rooms and cold corners of rooms.
- Wardrobes/cupboards and behind furniture against an external wall.
- Kitchen and bathroom where a lot of steam is created.

Reducing condensation

There are four things to consider when dealing with a condensation problem:

Heating - Condensation is most likely to be a problem in homes that are underheated. Try to keep temperatures in all rooms to above 15°c as this will reduce condensation forming on external walls.

Insulation - Insulating your home will have a threefold value in tackling the problem: warming the surface temperature of walls, ceilings and windows generally increasing the temperature of the home reducing heating costs thus allowing the home to be heated to a higher standard more affordably.

Ventilation - Condensation will occur less if you allow air to circulate freely. Make sure vents and airbricks are not covered or obstructed.

Moisture - Take steps to reduce the amount of moisture in the air by following some of our top tips.

Top tips to reduce condensation

In cold weather, try and keep temperatures between 18-21 C in main living areas whilst indoors.

Don't dry clothes on radiators. This will make your boiler work harder to heat your house and cost almost as much as using a tumble dryer, whilst creating a lot of condensation.

To kill and remove mould, wipe down with a fungicidal wash which carries a health & safety approved number.

Don't block airbricks of air vents.

Dry washing outside whenever possible.

If you have to dry clothing indoors and don't have a tumble dryer, place clothes on a drying rack in a room where a window can be opened slightly and keep the door closed.

In the living room:

- Open window trickle vents during the day or when going out, or open windows for at least 10 minutes every day.
- Lay thick carpet with a good thermal underlay.
- Hang thick, heavy lined curtains during the winter to keep the room warm.

In the kitchen:

- Close internal doors and open a window.
- Use an extractor fan if you have one.
- Put lids on pans (this also reduces boiling times and helps save money).
- Only boil as much water as you need in a kettle to reduce steam and save money.

Decorating:

- When wallpapering use a paste containing a fungicide to prevent further mould growth.
- Use thermal lining paper under wallpaper when decorating.
- Use mould-resistant paint on areas prone to mould such as ceilings above windows.

In the bedroom:

- Wipe down windows with a window squeegee.
- Don't put furniture, including beds, against any external walls and try to leave a gap between the wall and furniture to allow airflow.

In the bathroom:

- Open windows whilst bathing/washing and leave them open, for about 20 minutes after, if it is safe to do so.
- Use an extractor fan if you have one.
- Take short and cooler showers.
- When running a bath put the cold water in first; this results in significantly less condensation.
- Don't leave wet towels lying around.

Useful Contacts

National Energy Action (NI): 028 9023 9909 | warmandwell@nea.org.uk

Consumer Council: 028 025 1600 | info@consumercouncil.org.uk

Advice NI: 0800 915 4604 | advice@adviceni.net

Northern Ireland Energy Advice Service: 0800 111 4455 | nienergyadvice@nihe.gov.uk
www.nihe.gov.uk/NI-Energy-Advice

Keep up to date with the work and training events of NEA NI and CCNI via our social media and websites

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Action for Warm Homes

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