DEALING WITH DAMP, MOULD AND CONDENSATION

DAMP

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

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 in the ground water.

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.

Typical signs of penetrating damp are:

- growing areas of damp on walls or ceilings
- blotchy patches on walls
- wet and crumbly plaster
- signs of spores or mildew
- drips and puddles

CONDENSATION

During the colder months condensation becomes a major problem in many British 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 how old it is. 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.

Areas prone to condensation

The following areas are particularly prone to condensation:

- cold surfaces such as mirrors, windows and window frames
- kitchens and bathrooms where a lot of steam is created
- outside walls, walls of unheated rooms and cold corners of rooms
- wardrobes/cupboards and behind furniture against an outside wall

The major difference between condensation and other forms of dampness is that you can reduce or solve the problem just through changing behaviour in the home.

Condensation in the home occurs when there is too much moisture in the air.

LEAP
LOCAL ENERGY ADVICE PARTNERSHIP

Take steps to reduce the amount of moisture in the air by following the checklists below:

- In cold weather try and keep temperatures between 18-21°C in main living areas whilst indoors
- Don't block airbricks or air vents
- To kill and remove mould, wipe down wall and window frames with a fungicidal wash which carries a Health & Safety Executive approved number
- Dry washing outside whenever possible
- 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
- If you need to dry clothing indoors and don't have a tumble dryer, place clothes on a drying rack in a sunny room where a window can be opened slightly and keep the door closed
- No drying rack? Put your clothes on hangers and hang from a curtain pole above a slightly opened window; this can also reduce the need for ironing

OTHER WAYS YOU CAN REDUCE CONDENSATION IN YOUR HOME

- Close internal doors whilst cooking 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
- Open windows whilst bathing/washing/showering and leave them open for about 20 minutes after, if it is safe to do so
- Take shorter and cooler showers
- When running a bath put the cold water in first; this results in significantly less condensation
- Wipe down windows/mirrors/tiles/shower doors with a window squeegee and mop up the moisture with a super absorbent cloth which can be wrung out in the sink
- Don't leave wet towels lying around
- Try drying yourself with a smaller towel and wringing it out, wrapping yourself in a bigger towel or dressing gown for warmth. Microfibre towels are great for this as they both absorb more water and dry quickly
- Open window trickle vents during the day or when going out, or open windows for at least 10 minutes every day
- Don't put furniture, including beds, against any outside walls and try to leave a gap between the wall and furniture to allow airflow
- Lay thick carpet with a good thermal underlay
- Hang thick, heavy lined curtains during the winter

MOULD

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

The mould and its spores carry the musty 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.

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