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Damp and mould

Damp and mould are problems for landlords and tenants, regardless of the age of the rental property. It's important that both parties understand the causes and best ways to prevent the problems from worsening. Mould is a symptom of damp so if it occurs it is important to find the source of the damp.

What causes damp?

Rising damp can occur if the damp proof course or membrane within the walls or floors of your dwelling has been breached. Prevalent in ground floor flats as well as houses due to damp proof course failure, something that generally occurs over a long period of time.

Penetrating damp. Rain may also seep through cracks in brickwork or through missing tiles on external roof surfaces.

Blocked guttering may also mean water spills over and saturates external walls.

External plumbing which is cracked may allow seepage into internal parts.

Condensation occurs in a dwelling when warm moist air produced by ordinary activities such as showering or cooking meets a cold surface such as an external wall or window.

The moisture laden air will remain internally if ventilation and warming do not occur and will gravitate towards the nearest cold surface where it condenses (forms water and damp).

Moisture is also naturally occurring in the air and when air temperatures drop it will release this water in droplet form.

Condensation generally occurs during cold spells of weather. It will appear on cold surfaces and in microclimatic areas where there is little movement; for example, behind a cupboard.

This will often lead to the formation of mould growth and mainly occurs in corners of rooms, in cupboards or on north facing walls, as these are generally the coldest.

Examples of condensation

Lack of insulation at construction

Properties constructed during certain eras did not have the tighter construction and insulation standards now required. Consequently, they are potentially more susceptible to the development of condensation than modern buildings.

Areas where this can occur are areas of a property that were difficult to insulate at construction such as above or below balconies or under crofts.

Insulation causes a warming effect which helps to counteract the conditions under which condensation can develop.

Cold spots/bridging

Certain construction elements such as concrete beams by their very nature are cold and that insulating them to bring them up to modern standards can prove to be difficult. As a consequence, many properties have cold spots or suffer from thermal bridging.

Lack of ventilation

The development of condensation can be controlled in part by increasing ventilation throughout the dwelling. In tenanted properties there is a preconception that ventilation means higher heating bills and as such there are growing examples of condensation which is exacerbated by

the blocking up of trickle vents (vents within window frames) or traditional air vents which are found individually within rooms.

Remedies and Precautions

With the correct balance of **heating** and **ventilation**, condensation should be avoided. The heating helps keep the property warm and the ventilation will enable excess moisture laden air to escape.

How to avoid condensation.

TIP: **Improving ventilation (opening windows, trickle vents).**

Using the thermostat. Set it on for long periods on a low setting or have it switched to operate automatically on shorter periods for at least seven hours a day. Do not adjust the thermostat manually when set but trust the system to regulate itself for you. Make sure there are no cold zones in the home by turning all radiators on.

TIP: **Improving heating (constant temperature space heating).**

How to reduce moisture production.

✓ Cover saucepans.

✓ Dry clothing outside rather than on radiators.

✓ Wipe away condensation as quickly as it's spotted.

✓ Keep window trickle vents open constantly and open windows as much as possible (especially after cooking or showering) to allow a through flow of air whilst maintaining a heat balance.

✓ Ensure extractor fans are operational, you can test pull by holding a sheet of tissue paper against it and seeing if it sticks.

✓ Turn on the cold tap of the bath first so that when the hot water hits its doesn't produce as much steam.

✓ Close doors in wet areas to stop the spread of moisture to other rooms.

✓ Where possible position cupboards and drawers etc. against internal walls.

How much moisture is typically produced in the home?

- Drying clothes produces ten pints of water in an unvented tumble dryer.
- Having a bath produces two pints of moisture.
- Washing clothes produces one pint of moisture.

Fighting mould.

✓ Remove mould growth by wiping down walls and windows with a fungicidal wash recognised by a Health and Safety Executive 'approval number'. Follow the manufacturer's instructions precisely. Dry clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets. Take care because disturbing mould can increase the risk of respiratory problems.

✓ After treatment, redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint to help prevent mould recurring.

✓ Ensure insulation to external walls is in place

✓ Improving ventilation (fan installation, opening windows, trickle vents, pacifier vents)

✓ Improving Heating (constant temperature space heating)

Useful information

The following links are to recognised organisations that can provide advice in relation to dampness and condensation.

Royal Institution Chartered Surveyors: **www.rics.org/uk**

Property Care Association: **www.property-care.org**

Health & Safety Executive: **www.hse.gov.uk**