

TENANTS GUIDE TO PREVENTING DAMP AND CONDENSATION

If you are experiencing condensation and mould growth in your home please read the following information which may help you in preventing this problem: Condensation is usually caused by a mixture of lack of heating, lack of fresh air and too much moisture in the air.

Damp Housing

Millions of homes in the UK suffer with dampness problems and this means that they are often:

- More difficult to heat and keep comfortable
- Suffer with mould growth and have lots of dust mites.
- This in turn can increase the risk of respiratory illness, and allergic reactions such as sneezing, eye irritation and coughing, resulting mainly from mould spores.
- Mould growth also looks unsightly and can cause damage to wallpaper, wall surfaces, furniture, clothing and window frames.

What causes dampness?

Condensation is only one form of dampness.

- Condensation is normally caused by living styles rather than problems with the property.
- Normal activities such as washing, cooking and laundry increase the amount of moisture in the air in our homes and if this moist air comes into contact with a cold wall or window it will condense into water droplets.
- Areas that are prone to condensation are kitchens and bathrooms, behind furniture against outside walls, and wardrobes and cupboards.

There are other causes of damp in the home that can be distinguished as they often leave a tidemark on walls, floors or ceiling.

- Rain penetration or leaking drainpipes – rain can seep through the roof where a tile is damaged or from cracked or blocked drainpipes.
- Rising Damp – this occurs only on ground floor walls due to there being either no damp-course or faulty damp-course.
- Plumbing problems – damp can arise from small leakages over a long period of time.

How do I reduce or avoid condensation?

“The average family produces 20 pints of moisture every day”

1. Reduce Moisture

- Cover saucepans when cooking.
- Dry washing outdoors whenever possible on a line or in the bathroom with the door shut and windows open.
- Unless it is the self-condensing type, vent tumble dryers outside. DIY kits are available for this.
- Avoid using paraffin and portable flue-less bottle gas heaters as these put a lot of moisture in the air.
- When cooking or washing open a window, but keep doors of kitchens and bathrooms closed to limit moisture moving to other areas of your home.
- Dehumidifiers can ease condensation problems in well-heated homes

2. Keep your home warm

- Draught proofing can reduce heat loss through windows, doors and floorboards.
- In very cold weather, keep a background heat on for long periods of time.
- Do not wait until it starts to turn cold before putting your heating on.
- Keeping sufficient heat in the property will help maintain the structure above dew point.
- With Economy 7 or night storage heaters it is important to anticipate temperatures and adjust input and output controls as necessary. You may need to supplement the heating with a convector heater during periods of very cold weather.
- Do not put heating on for short periods i.e. one hour or less. This will ensure the problem becomes worse. Do put heating on for at least 3 hours at a time.

3. Ventilate your home

If the exchange of air is poor or prevented the air in the house becomes saturated and water vapour will condense.

It can be difficult to get the balance right as opening windows in cold weather can then make your home cold and in turn increase the risk of condensation.

- Open windows slightly on opposite sides of the home to give cross ventilation but not so much that the temperature falls excessively.
- If your windows have small trickle vents leave them open most of the time.
- Ensure that any air bricks, grills or fire and cooker flues are not blocked.
- Allow air to circulate behind furniture. Don't push furniture right up against walls e.g. bedsteads, wardrobes and drawers.
- Avoid overfilling wardrobes and cupboards as stagnant air pockets can build up leading to mould growth.
- Use any extractor fans that you have in the property – they were put there for a reason!

Steps against mould

Mould growth occurs when mould spores germinate on contact with surfaces that are damp through condensation.

The only way to eliminate mould completely is to eliminate the cause of dampness in your home and to then treat mould infestation.

- To remove and kill mould, wash walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash which carries a Health and Safety Executive 'approval number' and follow the manufacturers' instructions.
- If there is mould on clothing, carpets or furnishing, they will need to be shampooed or dry cleaned, unsettling mould by vacuuming or brushing can cause respiratory problems.
- When redecorating, use a good quality fungicidal paint to prevent mould returning.

Mould does not return if you eliminate dampness; this is the only long-term solution of preventing severe mould problems.

