

Reducing Condensation Damp and Mould

Condensation accounts for approximately 70% of reported domestic damp and is undoubtedly a contributing cause of some infestation by wood boring beetle and dry rot outbreaks.

Condensation can commonly be attributed to a lack of balance between heating and ventilation resulting in a rise in relative humidity. Air can hold more water vapour when warm than when cold. When warm air is cooled, such as when the heating system is switched off at night, it will deposit the water that it can no longer retain as condensation on a cold surface.

In more severe cases, it can be absorbed by surface wall finishes and underlying plaster causing dampness although the underlying brickwork or masonry will normally be of a lower moisture content. It may cause mildew on fabrics and leather and, in extreme cases, can cause walls to be visibly wet. It is frequently accompanied by mould growth, of which the most common is “black spot” – a mould which appears first as small soot-like spots, and which can join up and cause large black areas. Condensation may occur at any height on almost any cool surface.

Condensation damp permits fungal growth. Materials such as wood, paper, wallboard, ceiling tiles, furnishing fabrics and even masonry and plaster can provide nutrients sufficient for mould growth providing the controlling factor is present i.e the availability of sufficient moisture.

The following can help to reduce condensation damp and mould:

1. Produce less moisture by

- Covering boiling pans and turning boiling kettles off.
- Avoiding paraffin and portable gas heaters as these add moisture to the air.
- Drying washing outdoors or in the bathroom with the door closed, window open or fan turned on.
- Venting tumble dryers using proper vent kits or use a self condensing type.

2. Ventilate to remove moisture

- Keep a small window or trickle ventilator open when the room is in use.
- Ventilate kitchens and bathrooms when you are using them.
- Prevent the warm damp air spreading by keeping bathroom and kitchen doors closed when the room is in use.

- Ventilate cupboards and wardrobes. Do not put too many things in them so preventing air circulation. Where possible put them on internal walls.

3. Keep your home warm

- Heat your home at low levels for a long time rather than high levels for short periods; this will ensure that few cold surfaces are in the home. In cold weather provide a low background heat even when there is no one there.
- Heat using a dry heat source, for example gas central heating or electric storage heaters or a fitted gas fire. Do not use paraffin or portable gas heaters.
- Loft insulation and cavity wall insulation, if cavity wall construction, will help to keep your home warm.

4. Dealing with mould growth

- Try to ensure condensation does not occur.
- Mould on washable surfaces can be removed with a fungicide solution readily available from stores or a mild bleach solution as soon as it starts to appear.
- Other items such as materials can often be washed, although this may not always remove the mould staining.
- Once the condensation is under control the affected area can be painted with an anti-fungal paint.