

Advice for Tenants/Owners on Damp, Mould and Condensation

The air in buildings can have a high level of relative humidity due to the activity of the occupants (e.g. cooking, drying clothes, breathing etc.). When this water laden air comes into contact with cold surfaces such as windows and cold walls it can condense, causing water to be deposited. The point at which the water held in the air changes from vapour to liquid is known as the dew point. A number of the flats at Highland Court have suffered from this problem.

However, condensation isn't the only cause of damp. It also comes from: leaking pipes, wastes or overflows; rain seeping through the roof or spilling from a blocked gutter; penetrating around window frames, or leaking through a cracked pipe; and rising damp due to a defective damp course or because there is no damp course.

Condensation

Running water on windows and walls is perhaps the most immediate indication of a condensation problem. If ignored this can lead to a deterioration in the decorative condition of the property, stained curtains and decay in window frames. Are your wall surfaces, windows, furniture or clothing damp? Can you see black mould growing on them? If so, it is likely that you have a condensation problem.

Condensation occurs mainly during cold weather, whether it is raining or dry. It appears on cold surfaces and in places where there is little movement of air. It forms when warm moist air and steam are produced and the warm air comes into contact with, and condenses on, a cold surface before it can leave the building. Look for it in corners, on or near windows, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards. It often forms on north-facing walls.

How to avoid condensation

There is no immediate or easy solution but as the occupier you are responsible for balancing the three main factors, which are moisture, ventilation and heating.

Moisture

Some ordinary daily activities produce a lot of moisture in a short time.

These five steps will help you reduce the condensation in your home by producing less moisture:

- Cover saucepans and do not leave kettles boiling.
- Avoid using paraffin and portable bottled gas heaters as these heaters produce a lot of moisture in the air.
- Do not dry washing on radiators.
- Dry washing outdoors on a line, or if this is not possible, hang it in the bathroom with the door closed and the window open or fan on.
- Tumble dryers must be vented to the outside.
- A dehumidifier may be used to help control moisture. This is a device which draws in air, cools it to remove moisture, which is collected in a reservoir and reheats it to an acceptable temperature before re-circulating it

Ventilation

You can ventilate your home without making draughts:

- Keep a small window ajar when someone is in the room. If your windows have been recently renewed open the trickle ventilators provided.
- Ventilate kitchens and bathrooms when in use by opening the windows wide, or better still, use an extractor fan if one is fitted.
- Close the kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use, even if your kitchen and bathroom have extractor fans. This will help prevent moisture reaching other rooms, especially bedrooms, which are often colder and more likely to get condensation.
- Do not block air-brick vents.
- Ventilate cupboards and wardrobes. Avoid putting too many things in cupboards and wardrobes as this stops the air circulating. Cut a ventilation slot in the back of each shelf or use slatted shelves.
- Where possible, position wardrobes and furniture against internal walls.

Do not

- Do not block permanent ventilators.
- Do not draught-proof rooms where there is condensation or mould.
- Do not draught-proof windows in the bathroom and kitchen.
- Do not tamper with any ventilation or extractor unit installed within your property.

Heating and insulation

You should make sure that you have adequate heating and insulation in your home to reduce moisture:

- Thermal comfort ranges are very subjective. When at home, the ideal temperature usually ranges between 19-22 degrees Celsius in the living rooms, including the kitchen and bathroom, and 16-20 degrees Celsius in the bedrooms.
- When away from home, the temperature in the rooms should not drop under 15 degrees Celsius. Intermittent heating and cooling of the property can aggravate condensation problems, since it allows warm damp air to cool, reducing its capacity to hold water.
- Do not heat up cold bedrooms in the evening by opening the door to heated rooms. The warm and humid air will condensate on the cold walls of the bedroom.
- Good insulation of the building creates warmer walls and ceilings, and therefore inhibits mould growth by preventing condensation from forming on them.

Steps against mould

First treat any mould you may already have in your home. If you then deal with the basic problem of condensation, mould should not reappear.

- To kill and remove mould, wipe down walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash or mould and mildew cleaner, following the manufacturer's instructions carefully.
- After treatment, you may want to redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint.
- Dry clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets.

If the above points are followed, condensation should not be a persistent problem in your home. However, you must remember that a balance is needed between these factors and you may need to experiment and persevere until the problem is resolved. You can carry out some of these measures at very little cost. However, if you are a tenant you may need the permission of your landlord.