Cernach
Housing Association
Limited

A guide to information on dampness, condensation, and mould

1. What is dampness?

Sometimes you hear people say a room is damp – what does this mean and how can it be addressed?

There are three main areas for dampness which can fall under:
I. Condensation
II. Rain penetration
III. Rising damp

As well as these big three areas, there are also other causes of damp such as ‘spillage’ and ‘pipe leakage’.

Kids splashing about in the bath or religious bathing can cause spillage. Other types of damp can be caused by a defective pipe which causes a leak from the toilet, shower or sink. It can show up on floors if the leak comes from a water piper under the floor or in a radiator pipe. It will appear as an obvious damp patch, and it doesn’t matter what the weather is like outside.

All buildings will have a level of water present including in building material which is completely natural. The amount of water depends on the material and humidity of the surrounding area.

Before we can determine what action needs to be taken, we need to determine what type of dampness it is and what are the root causes.

2. What is condensation?

There is always some moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. If the air gets colder, it cannot hold all the moisture and tiny drops of water appear – known as the ‘dew point’. In other words, condensation forms when warm, vapour-laden air meets the cold surface.

As the air cools, it cannot retain the moisture, and some of it condenses into small droplets of water on these cold surfaces. You can see this happening in your home e.g., on the bathroom mirror or cistern when the room is steamed up from the hot water of running a bath or shower, or moisture on windows when drying clothes indoors, or the kitchen windows steaming up when cooking.

Condensation often forms on north-facing walls due to lack of natural heat from sunlight. Condensation is often associated with poor heating and ventilation in buildings. It is more apparent in winter, as the external air temperature is low, and walls and windows are cold. The usual sequence of events is:

- Cold air enters the building
- The air is warmed for the comfort of the occupants
- The warm air takes up moisture
- The warm, moist air comes into contact with cold surfaces (e.g. walls, windows,) and is cooled below its dew point
- Condensation occurs as the excess moisture is released

What causes condensation?

Every day the UK's average household puts up to 12 litres of moisture into the air in their homes, through normal activities such as cooking, washing clothes and bathing. House plants and pets also contribute to water moisture in the air and condensation.

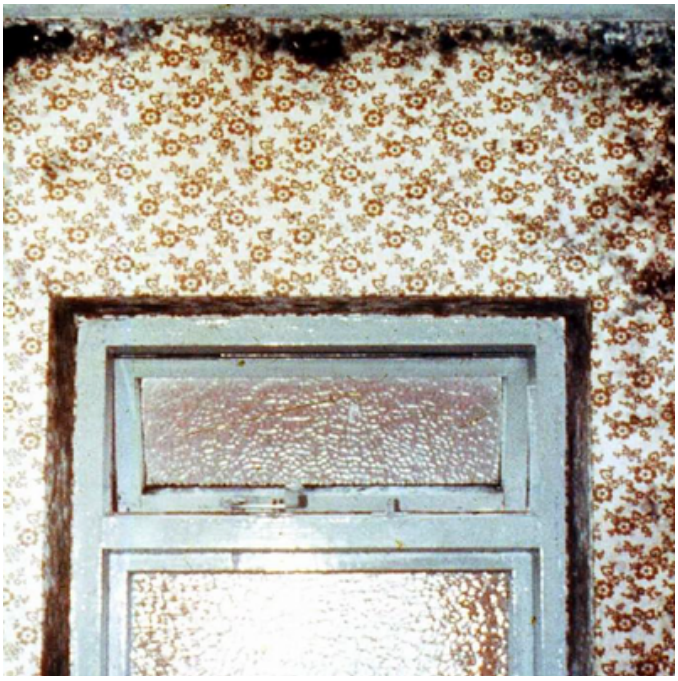
Here are some of the types of daily activities and the correlating amount of water vapour which they produce as below:

Cooking	**Up to 3 litres per day**
Clothes washing	**0.5 litres per wash**
Showers and baths	**1.5 litres per person**
Washing dishes	**1 litre per day**
Un-vented clothes drying	**5.0 litres per load**
Breathing, active adult	**0.2 litres an hour per person**
Breathing, adult asleep	**0.02 litres an hour per person**

Where can you find condensation?

Condensation doesn't just form on windows; it can form on any cold surface. Especially in areas where moisture can become trapped. This can include windows that have blinds or curtains, behind large furniture against a cold wall and inside a fitted wardrobe on an external wall.

Problems caused by 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 of the decoration in your property, such as stained curtains, decay in window frames and the appearance of mould on the surface of wallpapers and paint.

Condensation can also occur under suspended floors and in roof voids.

Usually, condensation disperses fairly quickly and does not cause more than minor inconvenience, but in homes which are poorly heated or inadequately ventilated, condensation can be serious and persistent, and leads to growth of mould.

Where there is a lack of ventilation and humidity levels remain high in the property, mould will be able to grow. Because windows and corners tend to be the coolest areas in a home, condensation is often found on or near those areas. It can also be found behind large objects such as beds and wardrobes.

In order to prevent condensation issues, it is important to keep a dry home, ensuring circulation of damp air caused by cooking, showering and drying clothes.

The most common cause of mould is condensation.

3. What is mould?

Mould is a fungus that requires high levels of moisture to survive. Mould pores exist in the atmosphere and are invisible to the human eye. They only become visible when they rest on a surface, where they can grow and multiply if left untreated.

Depending upon the type of mould, the appearance varies. Black mould is very common in homes that have high levels of condensation. For mould to be able to germinate on a surface, it requires the surface to be wet with condensation.

What to do if you have mould in your home?

If you see early stages of mould, it is important to clean it off the surface with fungicidal wash. Be careful not to brush, dust or vacuum as this can cause the mould to spread to other areas. If soft furnishings or carpet are affected, it is important to clean them thoroughly.

If you have mould growing, it is good to clean it off straight away to minimise any health risk, but you also need to fix the underlying cause of the damp to stop it coming back. If you don’t have any leaks or rising damp issues, then the problem is almost certainly condensation.

Fortunately treating condensation is often a matter of undertaking some simple changes that increase the air ventilation and circulation in your home.

4. Rain Penetration

This occurs when water penetrates the walls of a property through an external defect e.g., missing pointing on brickwork, a loose roof tile, cracked render, a blocked gutter, a leaking water pipe, seals failing around a window and existing cold bridge or perhaps spalled brickwork.

This type of dampness is usually more noticeable after it has rained and you will normally see a damp patch on the wall or ceiling that feels damp to touch.

5. Rising damp

This occurs when water rises from the ground into the walls of a building though capillary suction of brick or stone. Water breaks through and around a broken damp proof course and rises into the wall through the porous mortar and masonry used.

This type of damp only affects ground floor rooms and basements. Rising damp will usually rise up on wall to almost one meter.

Rising damp will usually leave a tide mark on the wall. You may also notice salt crystals on affected areas of the interior part of the external walls, which looks like a white powder on the wall.

How to beat condensation

Good ventilation

- Keep your home well ventilated by opening your windows daily for a short period (at least 15 minutes but no more than 60 minutes in cold weather) to allow fresh air into the room and move out stale moist air. This helps create a much healthier environment and helps to get rid of humidity, without making the room too cold.

- If your windows have trickle vents, make sure they are open each day as this allows a change of air, which is especially important for sleeping and living spaces.

- Do not block air vents or air bricks, as air ventilation stops moist air becoming trapped in one part of your home as it will condense on your walls.

- Keep internal doors closed when cooking and bathing so moisture doesn’t move throughout the rest of your home.

- Leave a small gap between the walls of your home and furniture as it allows the air to circulate around the room and move away from the bottom of the walls. If air lingers between the furniture and walls it will condense onto walls and could eventually form into black mould. Please keep an eye out for this especially in bedrooms where there are wardrobes and units up against walls.

- Do not overfill wardrobes and cupboards as this will restrict air flow.

- Open windows to allow steam to escape whilst cooking or bathing and for 15 minutes afterwards.

Heating

- Make sure your home is adequately heated. All rooms should have a low level of heat throughout the day. This is important during winter because it is the cold air which meets the warm air and releases the moisture. If the air is all the same temperature, then this cannot happen.

- When filling your bath run cold water first and then the hot, this will reduce the amount of steam (which leads to condensation) by 90%.

- When drying clothes inside your home make sure to open windows or use a vented tumble dryer running the vent pipe outside (unless it is a condensing tumble dryer) as this allows the moisture out. It is best if you can dry your clothes outside as this reduces moisture build up in your home.

Things you can do every day to beat condensation

Wipe down walls and windows regularly as well as any wet surfaces.

Do not overfill wardrobes and cupboards as this will restrict air flow.

Open windows to allow steam to escape.

When cooking always turn on the extractor fan and ensure you use lids on your pots and pans. Turn heat down once the water has boiled and only use the minimum amount of water in the pan.

Do not use gas or paraffin heaters as they produce high levels of moisture and are not permitted for use, as stated in your tenancy agreement.

Please remember

If you have any concerns about damp or condensation in your home, report it to us as soon as you are aware of it.

Reporting concerns means we can inspect and action what is causing the issue.

Whilst most condensation issues can be dealt with by you directly by implementing the recommendations in this booklet, you will not be able to deal with issues of rising damp, penetrating damp or pipe leakage and as your landlord, Cernach will deal with these.

Cernach

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