

Condensation Advice

During the winter months, many properties suffer from damp and mould growth due to condensation. Below you will find some information to be used to identify condensation and some preventative measures you can take.

Condensation is often confused with rising damp; the advice below should help to distinguish one from the other.

Causes and Signs of Condensation

Air can hold moisture - the warmer the air, the more moisture it can hold. If moist air is cooled by contact with cold surfaces, such as walls or windows, relative humidity increases and the moisture can condense into water droplets (condensation). Mould regularly occurs as a result of this high humidity. Mould often appears as black spots or areas, usually on the internal surfaces of external walls, in corners and in poorly ventilated spaces, such as behind cupboards and wardrobes.

Identification and Control Checklist

The condensation of atmospheric moisture on internal wall surfaces is often indicated by:

- Dampness being significantly higher on the inside of external walls than on internal walls, and if there is a post-war extension, the dampness is in the older part of the property.
- Dampness giving rise to mould growth, especially in coldest rooms. This mould is typically black in colour but sometimes can be seen as a white colour.
- Mould growth and dampness being concentrated in corners, i.e. wall/floor, wall/wall, and wall/ceiling corners, and behind furniture and stored items. This is where air circulation is poorest.
- Severe atmospheric moisture can lead to mould growth on carpets, furnishings, clothes, shoes, and other items, especially in cupboards, and near outside walls.
- Visual inspection which would suggest severe current dampness in certain areas, but may not be damp/wet to the touch, or supported by moisture meter readings.

VISUAL CHECKLIST FOR CONDENSATION



Mould growth on window sills



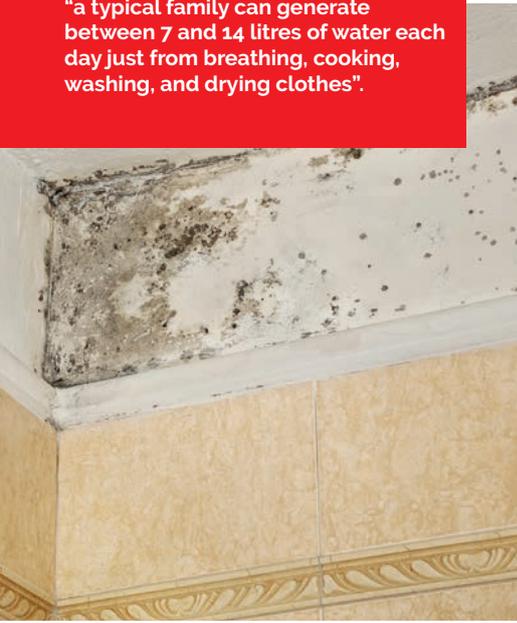
Black mould in corner of rooms



Visible condensation on windows and internal fixtures

The Building Research Establishment estimates:

“a typical family can generate between 7 and 14 litres of water each day just from breathing, cooking, washing, and drying clothes”.



PHOTOGRAPHED EXAMPLES OF TYPICAL MOULD CAUSED BY CONDENSATION

Factors Which Can Encourage Condensation and Mould Growth:

- Intermittent heating
- Lack of ventilation
- Drying and airing clothes indoors (including unvented tumble dryers)
- Occupants bathing and showering frequently
- The provision of double glazing and high performance joinery which reduces draughts, and consequently the air changes within the property
- Solid, un-insulated external walls
- Occupant's home cooking, especially boiling without pan lids
- The dampness is worse in the autumn and winter when there is poorer drying weather
- The use of mobile gas and oil heaters or the use of propane gas cookers/hobs
- Building work undertaken within the past year
- Poor maintenance, e.g. leaking plumbing, defective gutters, etc.

Factors Which Will Reduce Condensation:

- Increase the minimum temperature of the property, especially in the coldest parts of the property.
- Maintain regular ventilation. A little constant ventilation is often better than a lot occasionally.
- Drying and airing clothes outside the property. If concrete kerbs or paths are dry or drying, washing will dry to a large extent if hung outside. Tumble dryers should be properly vented.
- Bathrooms and shower rooms should have an extractor fan wired to the light switch with a 15 – 20-minute time delay so that the fan extracts moist air after the light is turned off. The inlet to the fan should be in, or as close to the ceiling as possible, and definitely above door head height.
- After washing and bathing, dry towels outside when possible. The removal of excess moisture from the body with a face cloth can reduce the need for drying towels. The wiping down of tiles, and bath or shower can also help.
- If double glazing is to be fitted, it should include trickle vents.
- Insulate external walls in severe cases.
- Any wet surfaces should be wiped dry, e.g. floors, bath tiles, etc. Avoid leaving standing water e.g. in washing up bowls.
- When cooking keep saucepan lids on to reduce steam.
- Mobile gas/oil heaters and propane ovens/hobs should not be used for general heating.
- Correct other causes of moisture including those of poor maintenance, e.g. leaking gutters or plumbing.
- Use a larger domestic dehumidifier on a regular basis, to maintain lower humidity levels, or to bring humidity levels under control.

The problem of condensation is difficult to cure; prevention is the best course of action.