

Mildew, Mould and Damp - PART 1

A major concern for tenants and landlords in rental properties are damp issues and the associated problems of mould and mildew which can lead to health problems. Prolonged

It is not usually possible to get rising damp in rooms on 1st floors etc therefore flats and upstairs rooms are not affected.

Penetrating Damp

This problem can be quite common and all manner of issues can cause it. Basically, rain water is entering the building. Common causes can be failed roofing parts and failed guttering. Or often pointing and flashing have failed and thus allow water to enter the building or soak through walls. Do not underestimate wind conditions; sometimes strong winds, or winds from an unusual direction can blow water into failed pointing in this instance water might only penetrate occasionally. Sometimes structural errors have been made whereby incorrect/absent use of trays above window lintels are to blame. Also, old chimney stacks can be a cause. The causes are almost endless and a professional survey could well be required. The cost will vary depending on the cause - e.g. a quick gutter repair might be relatively cheap or major roofing work might be required involving scaffolding and several days' of work.

Condensation

This is the most common problem we see! Moisture-rich air is generated in the property by the occupant through showering, baths, cooking, drying clothes, using gas hobs and ovens etc. The moisture in the air then condenses on cold walls of the house (so usually the external walls and/or around windows). Exacerbating the problem is a lack of airflow and ventilation. This allows the moisture rich-air to stagnate - the lack of



ventilation means there is no new "dry" air passing through to carry the moisture away.

There are many causes of condensation and, most of them, relate to occupancy habits. Shower rooms and bathrooms need extractor fans to be used (or installed if not present).



and persistent mould and mildew problems can lead to uninhabitable homes and present major bronchial health concerns for occupants.

The aim of this information sheet is to provide some basic information. It should be borne in mind that we are not damp surveyors and this information offers just some basic guidelines. However, we see quite a few examples of these problems in various rental properties and can share useful experience.

The main question which arises is who is responsible for a remedy - landlord or tenant?!

To answer that question, we need to look at the types of problems and causes - these fall into 3 main areas.

Rising Damp

This issue is not as common as many may think. The problem occurs when a property has no damp-proof course (usually old properties) or when the damp proof course has been breached (for whatever reason). Water "wicks" up through the wall and presents itself with a noticeable damp line up to 1 meter above ground level. Salts from the ground are often seen on the surface of the wall.

The remedy is either chemical damp proof course injection and/or rendering (tanking) of the walls to prevent damp rising up the internal walls. This is expensive and usually requires the room to be completely vacated whilst work is undertaken and subsequent redecoration.

Windows need to be opened and rooms ventilated - more modern windows are fitted with trickle-vents which allow a small but consistent rate of ventilation through the room. Clothes should be dried outside wherever possible. Also, the home needs to be heated - if the home is not heated then the walls remain cold and condensation can then occur. Also, heating sets off convective currents in the rooms and throughout the house thus helping with the movement of air.

Summary

This is a basic overview of the main types of damp within a property - the presence of damp per se is not a health problem - for example, a short term problem, say due to a failed gutter which is quickly resolved, is not really a cause for concern. Longer term problems and the presence of mould are the warning signs for potential health problems. Broadly speaking, Rising Damp and Penetrating damp are likely to be issues for the landlord to resolve; condensation is likely to be an issue for the tenant to resolve. If there is any doubt then an independent expert should carry out a survey - the local authority's environmental health department will also advise and assist if required.

Condensation is covered in more detail in Part 2 of this information sheet.

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