

## Mildew, Mould and Damp - PART 2

The aim of this information sheet is to provide some basic information regarding condensation in rental properties. 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.

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



A brief recap from the “Mildew Mould and Damp - Part 1”:

### 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. Mildew and mould can then grow.

There are many causes of condensation and, most of them, relate to occupancy habits! Here are the common causes and suggested solutions:

1) **POOR VENTILATION.** You must ventilate your home - use extractor fans, open windows and open trickle vents. Trickle vents should really be open all the time, not just when showering, cooking etc

2) **DRYING CLOTHES IN DOORS.** When clothes dry-out the water is simply transferred to the air inside the house. Therefore, suitable ventilation is required.

3) **TURNING OFF (or non existent) BATHROOM EXTRACTOR FANS.** Do not turn them off! Extractor fans usually have an over-run timer to allow sufficient time for bathroom moisture to be extracted. Therefore, turning off the fan at the main isolator defeats the design and purpose of it. They are not there just for smelly reasons. They are required to expel moist air and therefore reduce/remove condensation problems.

4) **KEEPING DOORS CLOSED.** Often a spare room might not be used for many days or even weeks. Keeping the door and windows in that room closed will simply allow the air to stagnate - condensation can then form on the cold walls. Again, keep the ventilation sufficient.

5) **LARGE OBJECTS, CLUTTER OR EVEN FURNITURE.** Sometimes, items in a room can generate areas of stagnate air - for example behind wardrobes or in alcoves etc. Again, ventilation is important but so is adequate heating.

6) **INADEQUATE HEATING.** We understand that heating bills can be expensive but houses need adequate heating. Just heating, say, a living room with an electric heater whilst keeping the central heating for the whole house turned off for the winter is a sure way of generating condensation problems. Lack of heating will allow the fabric of the building to cool down and therefore water to condense on the walls. Also, radiators, when used, work by generating convective currents of air through the room thus ensuring that air is moving and helping to ventilate.

7) **HOUSE DESIGN.** Sometimes a property (especially older ones) can simply just be prone to condensation and mould no matter what efforts are made to reduce it. In mild cases it may just have to be the case that the occupant cleans the mould on a regular basis. In more extreme cases, the landlord should be prepared to have a professional survey undertaken and make modifications to the property.

8) POOR CLEANING AND HYGIENE. Bathrooms and shower cubicles are a hot-bed of bacteria, nutrients, warmth and moisture!! It might not be visible but all the bacteria and dead skin cells from our bodies form a nutrient medium for mould to grow in! Bathroom ventilation is really important. Baths, showers and sanitary areas need regular cleaning. Pure and simple. Black mould and mildew will not survive in a bathroom that is cleaned, with a proper bathroom cleaning agent, on a regular basis (usually weekly). Daily cleaning sprays designed to be used after each use of the shower or bath are excellent and can reduce the weekly chore of cleaning.

### Summary

When a mould or mildew problem is identified, it is often found to be an occupancy problem. If there is ever a dispute over this matter then we're of course prepared to seek professional advice or seek advice from the Local Authority's Environmental Health Department if required. Damp surveys are not free! Therefore, we analyse the situation as carefully as we can before asking the tenant or the landlord to pay for a survey to help resolve the matter.

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