Private Housing Standards

Damp and Mould

Sheffield City Council

Promoting safe, healthy and well managed privately owned homes

Leaflets also available on:

- Private Housing Standards - What we do
- Tenancy Relations
- Top 5 Hazards in the home

Is your home damp?

Damp can cause mould on walls and furniture and make window frames rot.

Damp housing encourages the growth of mould and mites and can increase the risk of respiratory illness such as Asthma, which can be caused or made worse through moulds.

Some damp is caused by condensation.

This leaflet explains how condensation forms and how you can keep it to a minimum, therefore reducing the risk of dampness and mould growth.

This leaflet tells you where to go for help with damp. For tenanted properties the leaflet explains where condensation is the responsibility of the landlord or the tenant.

What is condensation?

There is always some moisture in the air even if it cannot be seen. It can be seen as a mist when you breathe on a cold day, or when the bathroom mirror mists over, particularly in the winter. Moisture appears outside as fog or mist. If the air gets colder it cannot hold all the moisture and tiny drops of water appear; this is condensation. As the air gets colder the moisture in the air turns to larger droplets, becoming visible.

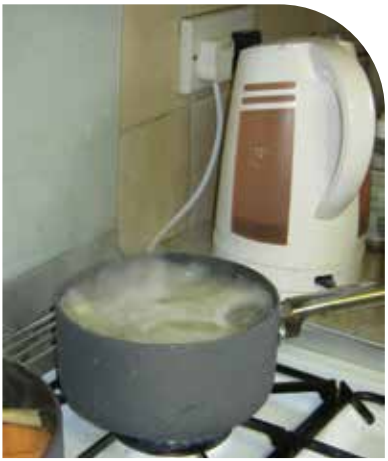
Condensation occurs mainly during the winter because a building is cold and windows are opened less meaning moist air cannot escape. It doesn't matter whether it is raining or dry. It doesn't leave a tidemark as other forms of dampness do. It appears on cold surfaces and in places where there is little movement of air. Behind cupboards, in corners, and around windows are typical places that condensation and mould occur.

High levels of moisture in the air in one part of the building (such as within bathrooms and kitchens) can result in condensation occurring in another parts of the building as the moisture will pass to the colder parts of the house.

How to avoid condensation

Follow these three steps to help you reduce the condensation in your home.

1. Produce less moisture



Some ordinary daily activities produce a lot of moisture very quickly.

- Cover pans and do not leave kettles boiling.
- Avoid using paraffin and portable flue-less bottled gas heaters, these types ofheater put 1.2 litres of water into the atmosphere for every 1 litre of fuel used.
- Avoid drying clothes on radiators or in front of fires as the moisture from the clothes will condense out on windows, walls and ceilings. Dry washing outdoors on a line, or put it in the bathroom with the door closed and the window open/fan on.

- Vent any tumble dryer on the outside, unless it is the self condensing type. DIY kits are available for this.

2. Ventilate to remove moisture

Homes can be ventilated without making draughts;

- Permanent vents such as air bricks and trickle vents should be used to allow a little background ventilation, especially when someone is in the room.
- Open bedroom windows in the morning to allow moisture built up over-night to escape.
- Ventilate kitchens and bathrooms when in use by opening the windows. Or better still; use a humidity–controlled electric fan. These are cheap to run and come on automatically when the air becomes humid, turning off when the air is drier.
- Close the kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use, even if your kitchen has an extractor fan. Closed doors help prevent moisture reaching other rooms, especially bedrooms, which are often colder and more likely to get condensation.
- When replacing window units, make sure that the new windows or frames have trickle ventilators.

3. Insulate and draughtproof

Insulation and draughtproofing will help keep homes warm and will also cut fuel bills. When the whole home is warmer, condensation is less likely.

- Insulate the loft. The current standard for roof insulation is 270mm. Most houses will have much less insulation than this unless improved recently. Remember the loft hatch needs draughtproofing but do not block the opening under the eaves.
- Insulate the gaps between the joists in the cellar where cellar ceilings have been removed.
- For Post-1920s houses cavity wall insulation would be a good improvement. Insulated plasterboards on internal walls to houses without cavity walls can be used to increase internal temperatures.
- Double glazing of windows will reduce heat loss and draughts, particularly in rooms with large windows.

For information and possible help to upgrade your home including insulation see:

Tel: **0800 107 8882**

E-mail: **info@warmhomesheffield.gov.uk**

Website: **www.warmhomesheffield.gov.uk/phs**

4. Heating

Appropriate controllable heating should be properly installed and maintained. In a shared house, bedsits or flats all the occupants should have control of heating to their rooms. The correct application of heating will help reduce condensation problems.

- Central heating is usually the best form of heating.
- Thermostatic valves on individual radiators and heaters help control heating to individual rooms.
- In cold weather, keep low background heating on all day, even when there is no one at home.
- Modern central heating timers allow for different heat levels at different times of the day.
- If heating is not used enough the structure will not heat up and leave it vulnerable to condensation problems.
- Avoid heaters that do not warm up the structure.

Is it condensation?

Condensation is not the only cause of damp. It can also come from:

- Leaking pipes, wastes or overflows, either inside or outside the building.
- Rain seeping through the roof where a tile or slate is missing, spilling from a blocked gutter, penetrating around window frames, or leaking through a cracked pipe.
- Rising damp due to a defective damp proof course or because there is no damp course.

These causes of damp usually leave a tidemark.

If the home is newly built it may be damp because the water used during its construction is still drying out. This occurs in plaster and concrete floors.

If the home is damp for any of those reasons it may take weeks of heating and ventilation to dry out. If the problem is due to any of these causes then it is likely to be part of the landlords repairing responsibilities.

If you do not think the damp comes from any of these causes, then it is probably condensation.

Words of Warning:

To avoid build up of moisture and to help reduce chances of Carbon Monoxide poisoning

- **Do not block permanent ventilators**.
- **Do not completely block chimneys**. Instead, leave a hole about two bricks in size and fit a louvered grille over it.
- **Do not draughtproof rooms** where there is condensation or mould.
- Rooms with gas or solid fuel fires, cookers or boilers will **require adequate ventilation** to these, so do not draughtproof in these rooms.
- **Do not draughtproof windows** in the bathroom and kitchen.

First Steps against Mould

- First treat any mould. Once the cause of the condensation is resolved mould should not reappear.
- To kill and remove mould, wipe down walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash to kill the mould. Follow the manufacturer's instructions precisely. Wallpaper will need to be removed in the affected area. After treatment, redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint to help prevent mould recurring.
- If wallpaper is to be replaced it should be replaced only after the condensation has been eliminated and a fungicidal wallpaper paste should be used.
- Dry–clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets. Disturbing mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning can increase the risk of respiratory problems.
- The only lasting way of avoiding severe mould is to eliminate dampness.

If the landlord has provided correct levels of insulation, suitable heating and ventilation then it will usually be the responsibility of the tenant to treat for mould.

Useful Information

Houses with low Energy Performance Certificate ratings will be most vulnerable to condensation. These houses may suffer from Excess Cold, one of the most common hazards that affect Sheffield's homes. Sheffield's top 5 hazards are:

Each of these hazards are looked at in our booklet 'Sheffield's Top 5 Hazards in the Home' including the typical causes of the hazard and what can be done to make the property safer:

Advice for Tenants

Where private tenants have condensation and mould problems this booklet should identify the likely cause. If it is due to inadequate heating, ventilation or insulation then these will usually be the responsibility of the landlord. The first approach to seek improvements should be to see the landlord. Where the landlord is reluctant to make improvements then we will give advice and in some cases, take action where landlords fail to attend to serious hazards.

For further help and advice contact:

Private Housing Standards, PO Box 5967, Sheffield S2 9GH

Tel: **0114 273 4680**

E-mail: **phs@sheffield.gov.uk**

Website: **www.sheffield.gov.uk/phs**

This document can be supplied in alternative formats, please contact 0114 273 4680

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Private Housing Standards
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