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Property Management Services

There is damp and mould on my surfaces!!! Where is this coming from, and how can we fix it?

It's that time of year when we are receiving calls and email about damp and mould collecting on walls and ceilings. Tenants and owners are looking for leaks or issues with the building itself. Although this may be the case, more often than not the cause is due to internal condensation. This derives from high relative humidity within the property coupled with poor insulation, lack of ventilation and poor temperature control. .

In order to explain this in more detail let me first explain the three different types of damp a property can suffer from:

1. Rising damp
2. Penetrating damp
3. Condensation

Rising Damp:

This is where the damp is coming from the ground up. It will generally cause damage only to the bottom part of a property, about a meter up and can be treated with a new damp course which can last for 25-30 years.

Penetrating Damp:

This can be external or internal.

External is when water is entering the building from the outside. This could be down to a cracked roof tile, damaged brickwork or issues with the window seals. Internal is when it is due to a damaged water tank or plumbing issues.

With penetrating damp you should be able to see patches on the walls and ceilings and a quick survey using a damp meter should be able to identify approximately where the leak is coming from. The solution either way is to identify the leak, fix it at source and then dry out the structure before redecorating.

Surface Damp:

This is one of the most common causes of damp and the cause is condensation. Believe it or not, the average household produces between 14-24 liters of vapor every day. This vapor is created by day-to-day living such as breathing, drying clothes, cooking, boiling kettles, bathing/showering,

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unvented dryers, washing machines. Vapour is held in the warm air and must be allowed out of the property to prevent condensation from occurring.

Look out for black mould. It mainly occurs at skirting level, in the corners of walls, behind furniture or curtains where airflow is restricted or more often than not on the coldest surfaces such as the inside of an external wall, concrete surfaces, ceilings, tiled walls, under sinks and hand basins. Basically, wherever the coldest spots are in the property. If it is not dealt with black mould can spread to furnishings, curtains and other household items.

Black mould is almost exclusively caused by condensation, which tends to be more of a problem in winter months.

So, how to deal with Black Mould?

- Firstly, you need to carefully and cautiously clean it
- Keep your house clean and tidy
- Ventilation
- Dehumidifiers
- Better heating management
- Insulation
- Lifestyle changes
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Cleaning Mould:

You can buy specialist mould cleaning sprays or create a solution yourself.

One part bleach, four parts water is an effective mould killer. Use gloves and a mask when cleaning the mould and dispose of all items after the job is done to prevent the mould from spreading onto other household items.

Keeping your house clean and tidy:

Cleaning dusting hoovering and regularly changing shower curtains will help get rid of any dormant spores of mould and reduce chances of it coming back.

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Ventilation:

Ventilate your property frequently and for a decent amount of time each day. I would recommend keeping all internal doors open and leaving your windows wide open in the morning when you wake up for a good hour if you can in as many rooms as possible, if not all.

Another effective way is to have mechanical ventilation in your bathroom and kitchen. This will allow any humid air to escape the property.

Most modern double glazed windows will provide some kind of venting option. Try to use your vents as often as possible to keep the air flowing in your property.

Dehumidifiers:

Using a dehumidifier will help by pulling moisture from the air in turn improving air quality and reducing dampness in your property.

Better Heat Management:

Repeated fluctuations in the temperature of your property can often cause mould to appear on surfaces. Each time the temperature in your property drops substantially this allows the moisture in the air to settle on the surface. In addition, as surface temperatures in your property increase this makes it less likely for condensation to form.

The best way to heat your property is through steady heat throughout the day and throughout the property. Heat the whole house, rather than just one or two rooms. You can achieve this using a combination of a timer and a thermostat. We recommend keeping your thermostat in the hallway (lounge if you don't have a hallway) and keeping the temperature between 17 and 23 degrees at all times. You might find that this will benefit your energy bills as your boiler is not working as hard to heat your home.

Insulation:

Mould tends to grow on cold surfaces.

Insulation can be very effective in helping you manage the temperature of your internal walls making it a great tool against mould growth. By insulating your property correctly you can support dry temperature controlled conditions which act against mould growth.

However, insulating incorrectly can add to the problem. The National Insulation Association (<https://www.nia-uk.org/>) has a very informative web site that can help you when deciding about insulation.

Page - 3

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Lifestyle Changes:

Making simple lifestyle changes can also help. For example, we recommend:

- Not drying your clothes and towels on your heaters.
- Try to mediate the temperature of your property throughout the day using a thermostat (keeping it between 17-23 degrees is optimal) .
- When having a shower or bath, close your bathroom door and ensure your bathroom is well ventilated, leave your bathroom window open for a while after you have finished.
- Open windows in all rooms wherever possible daily.
- Put lids on pans when cooking.
- Uncover ventilation vents.
- Regularly clean your extractor fans. Use a Hoover to suck out any dust.
- Leave internal doors open as to allow air to flow between rooms.
- Keep on top of it - Carefully clean the mould whilst looking to fix the route cause of the issue.