EPPING FOREST
DISTRICT COUNCIL

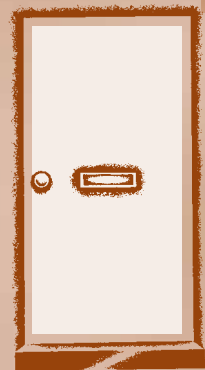# Keep your home free from damp and mould

Is your home damp? Damp can cause mould on walls, and it can ruin your decorations and furniture. Damp housing encourages the growth of mould and mites, and can increase the risk of respiratory illness.

One of the most common causes of damp is condensation. This leaflet explains how condensation forms and how you can keep it to a minimum, so reducing the risk of dampness and mould growth. It also explains how to identify common defects which can cause dampness to penetrate the walls of a dwelling. In cases where you can identify these, please let us know.

First steps against condensation

There is always moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. If the air gets colder it cannot hold all the moisture and tiny drops of water appear. This is condensation.

Condensation occurs mainly during cold weather, whether it is raining or dry. It appears on cold surfaces and in places where there is little movement of air. Look for it in corners, on or near windows, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards. It often forms on north-facing walls.

Condensation will also appear in your home if there is too much moist air caused by everyday activities such as cooking, washing and bathing.

You will need to take steps to deal with the condensation, but meanwhile there are some simple measures you can take right away.

- Wipe down the windows and sills every morning.
- Wring out the cloth rather than drying it on a radiator.
- You may be able to buy condensation channels or sponge strips from a home improvement store. You fit them to windows to collect the condensation and help prevent window frames from rotting, or damp forming under your sills. Care must be taken to fit these devices properly.

First steps against mould

First treat the mould already in your home. If you then deal with the basic problem of condensation, mould should not reappear.

Wipe down walls and window frames and clean with a mould cleaner as soon as mould appears. Follow the manufacturer's instructions precisely and ensure that the product is safe for you to use. Dry-clean mildewed clothes, and shampoo carpets. Disturbing mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning can increase the risk of respiratory problems. Most good home improvement stores and supermarkets supply products to remove mould.

After treatment, redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint to help prevent mould. Note that this paint is not effective if overlaid with ordinary paints or wallpaper. Wallpapering over mould will not get rid of the problem, it just hides it for a while.

The only lasting way of avoiding severe mould is to eliminate dampness.

In cold weather, the best way to keep rooms warm enough to avoid condensation is to keep low background heating on all day - even when there is no one at home. This is specially important in flats, bungalows and other dwellings where the bedrooms are not above a warm living room. It is always helpful to keep internal doors open, but keep kitchen and bathroom doors closed.

Controlling condensation

We all want to keep our homes as warm as possible, but it is also just as important to ventilate your home to help control condensation. You can minimise the moisture in your home by following these simple steps:

Produce less moisture:

■ Cover cooking pans with lids, and don't leave kettles boiling – as well as saving on your gas or electricity bill this will reduce the amount of moisture.

■ Try not to dry clothes inside, but if you do dry clothes inside you should open the window and shut the door of the room where the clothes are drying.

■ If you use a tumble dryer make sure it has a vent to the outside (unless it is the self-condensing type).

■ Avoid using portable gas and paraffin heaters as these fuels give off moisture when they burn – they are a major cause of condensation. A window should always be left open for safety reasons when using these heaters. They are also dangerous due to the fire hazard and risk of carbon monoxide.

■ Use an extractor fan in the bathroom and kitchen. Extractor fans are cheap to run and use less energy than a standard light bulb. This removes moist air straight away. Keep the fan on for a while after you have finished cooking. The Council will fit a fan if you do not have one, or if it is broken.

■ Close your kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use, even if the room has an extractor fan.

■ Open the window slightly for at least half an hour after bathing or cooking to get rid of the moist air. Keep the door closed.

■ Keep kitchen and bathroom doors shut to stop moisture moving to other areas of your home.

- If you have a fish tank make sure it has a lid otherwise water will evaporate causing excess moisture in the air.

Ventilate to remove moisture:

- To get rid of moisture, keep a small window ajar or trickle ventilator open when someone is in the room.

- Increase the ventilation in your kitchen and bathroom, or any room where excess moisture is created.

- Ventilate cupboards, wardrobes and blocked chimneys.

- Do not put furniture or other items right up against your walls because the space helps air circulate and stops mould growing. It is also always better to put furniture against internal walls, and not against the colder external walls.

- Do not block air vents.

- Some draughts in the home are a good thing as they help to ventilate.

Heat your home a little more

As condensation occurs on cold spots, warming up these areas can help to control condensation. We are helping keep your home warm by fitting double-glazed windows, and we are insulating lofts and walls.

Condensation and mould often form in a different place to where the moist air comes from. For example, moisture might come from your kitchen but mould might occur in any spare bedroom if it is not used very often. This can be because this room is not usually heated. Keep the door shut when you are cooking, bathing or showering, and try heating all rooms regularly. It is better to heat the whole home to a lower temperature than one room to a higher temperature.

When draughtproofing:

- Do not block permanent ventilators.
- Do not completely block chimneys (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.
- Do not draughtproof a room where there is a fuel burning heater (for example, a gas fire) or cooker.
- Do not draughtproof windows in the bathroom and kitchen.
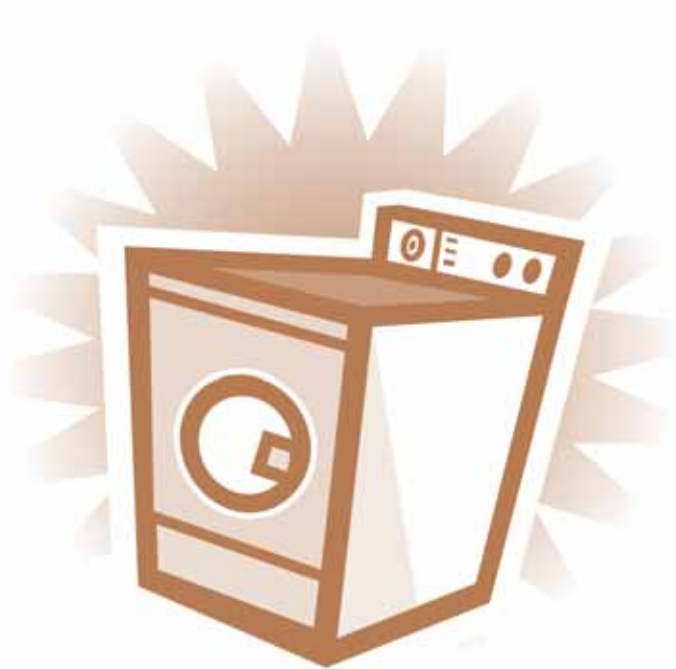
Are you sure it's condensation?

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

- Leaking pipes, wastes or overflows.

- 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-course or because there is no damp-course. You can identify this if there is a line (a "tidemark") around the lower part of the room or wall. It will be no higher than 75 cms (30") above the ground floor. It cannot be present upstairs.

Contact the Housing Repairs Section on 01992 564199 if you think the damp is due to any of these causes. If not, it is probably condensation. Follow the guidance in this leaflet and, if there is no improvement in 6 weeks, call us again to discuss the situation. We may then arrange an inspection of the property. But, we may charge you the cost of a wasted call if it is obvious that you are not following our guidance, and the issue is condensation caused by your life-style.

How to contact us:

Housing Repairs Section

Civic Offices, High Street, Epping CM16 4BZ

Phone: 01992 564199

Email: housingrepairs@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

The information given in this leaflet was correct at May 2014. Please be aware that there may have been changes since that time, such as new laws or council policies.

Please tell us if you would like this information provided in large print or another format.