A TENANTS GUIDE TO
CONDENSATION & MOULD GROWTH

If damage is caused to a property as a result of tenants poorly managing condensation, repair and redecoration costs can be charged against tenant deposits. To avoid this, here's some advice to help make living in the property a more pleasant experience and to limit any charges to tenants.

Condensation is an underestimated cause of damage to our homes. It can significantly contribute to spoiled paintwork, wallpaper and flaking plasterwork. The condensed moisture can also react with the plaster 'skim' coat and cause 'salting'.

What is Condensation?

Condensation is water that has been released from the air. Air contains water vapour in varying quantities, how much it can hold depends on its temperature.

Warm air holds more moisture than cold air. When moist air comes in to contact with either colder air or a colder surface, the air is unable to retain the same amount of moisture and the water is released to form condensation in the air or on the surface.

Condensation is generally noticeable where it forms on non-absorbent surfaces, such as windows, mirrors or tiles. However, it can form on any surface and it may not be noticed until mould growth or rotting of material occurs. The following sections explain further and give ideas on how to minimise the risk of this happening.

Condensation can occur during anytime of the year. Although, as the weather turns colder, condensation and mould can form more easily. Reports of mould tend to significantly increase during the colder months, from October to March. Over warmer months, issues are less common.

Typical health effects:

Condensation and mould growth are associated with:

- **Mould/fungal growth if left without treatment**

- **Increased prevalence of house dust mites**

- **Cardiovascular and respiratory illness.**

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EFFECTS OF CONDENSATION

Mould spores are the seeds of mould growth and are released in to the atmosphere when mould grows. Spores are microscopic, easily breathe in and are potent allergens too. They are always in the air and all they require is a source of moisture and food to grow.
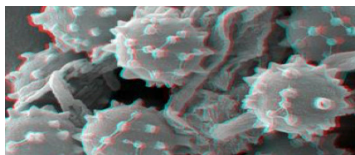
House dust mites live in carpets, mattresses, pillows and soft furnishings. They are invisible to the naked eye. The mites themselves are not the problem - they don't cause any direct harm! The problem is their droppings. They are so small that they are easily breathed in and are allergy causing agents. Lots of warm moisture encourages them to breed – rapidly!

Exposure to either or both allergens at high concentrations over a long period of time can cause increased sensitivity to them. Once a person is sensitised, relatively low concentrations of these allergens can trigger allergic reactions such as sneezing, a runny nose, eye infections, irritation, eczema, coughs and wheezing.

Black mould growth is the most common effect of condensation, but mould can appear in other colours such as grey or green on carpets, clothing and wood.

WHERE DOES THE MOISTURE COME FROM?

The moisture in the air comes from multiple sources within the house. Water vapour is produced in relatively large quantities from normal day to day activities.

FACT:

A 5 person household puts about 10 kg of water into the air every day (1 kg of water equates to about 1 litre)

- Breathing (asleep) 0.3 kg
- Breathing (awake) 0.85 kg
- Cooking 3 kg
- Personal washing 1.0 kg
- Washing and drying clothes 5.5 kg

CONDITIONS IN WHICH CONDENSATION OCCURS

The effect of moisture generation is made worse by keeping the moist air in the house - it is theoretically possible to avoid condensation by adequate ventilation. Usually in certain areas of a house (such as bathrooms and kitchens) the warm air contains a lot of moisture, if that air then spreads to cooler parts of the house, it will condense on any colder surface.

Ventilation is only effective if consistent throughout the whole envelope of the house. Condensation is encouraged by poor air circulation where stagnant air pockets form (behind furniture and in cupboards) and the first evidence is often the appearance of mould growth.

Modern life styles mean that many houses remain unoccupied and unheated throughout the greater part of the day, allowing the fabric of the building to cool down. The moisture producing activities are then concentrated into relatively short periods (morning and evening) when the structure is relatively cold while the building is still warming up.

A combination of heating and ventilation is the main form of control. A change of air is recommended in all rooms in the house, at the very least, once a day. Firstly, however, you should ensure that the amount of moisture in the air is not excessive.

Remember, this information is provided for tenants to use in controlling condensation and mould growth problems. Problems will not go away without attention from tenants!

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If your house it too cold you will notice that:

- Your house, clothing and bedding will feel cold and damp.
- There will be a musty, damp smell.
- You may notice some mould growth on furniture/ external walls, in cupboards/drawers, on or around windows and on your clothing/bedding.
- Wallpaper may start peeling around windows or other areas.
- It takes a long time before your heating begins to take effect, leaving you not feeling property warm and walls stay cold to the touch.

How to control condensation: Look at your lifestyle within the building

Produce less moisture by:

- Covering boiling pans, opening windows and closing doors when cooking.
- Air-dry clothes outdoors – NOT inside the property.
- Make use of the dryer machine – all Smart Properties are fitted with one of these.
- Hanging wet coats in the hallway when people visit.
- Considering the use of moisture traps - these can be bought for as little as £5 online.
- Wiping up any water puddles lying on window sills etc.
- Open windows when ironing

Ventilate your home by:

- Ventilating the room to the outside when using the bath or shower – open a window and close the door.
- Trying to increase the change of air in the premises by opening windows daily for no longer than 30-60 minutes at a time to avoid over-ventilating the property.
- Positioning furniture so that it's a little further away from the walls, so the air has a free flow around the room.

- Refraining from over-filling cupboards to bursting point - again, allow the air to flow.
- Ensuring trickle vent flaps on windows are open and air vents are unblocked.
- Ensuring extractor fans are on and in full working condition, in both kitchens and bathrooms.

Adequately heat your home by:

- Ensuring heating is thermostatically controlled wherever possible at a temperature between 18-21C.
- Make use of any timer facility on your boiler to control heating.
- Keeping heating on, at a low setting, all day in colder weather. (This is also more economical than blasting the heating for short periods of time!)
- Ensuring that when heating is turned up, this is for a minimum of 3 hours. Any less will worsen the problem as the air will absorb the water vapour more quickly than walls can heat up. Thus, meaning that when heating is turned off, the air will cool quickly causing rapid condensation and cooling walls further.

Removing mould growth:

In the unfortunate case that mould might have appeared, here are the steps to take:

1. Wash the affected area with an anti-mould cleaner or non-ammonia soap/detergent, using hot water.
2. Rinse and dry the affected area.
3. Use an anti-mould disinfectant or diluted bleach once the area has been thoroughly cleaned to ensure that most microorganisms have been killed.
4. Any fabrics/clothing/soft-furnishings should be put in the washing machine on as high temperature as possible, without damaging the items.

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