



Private Sector Housing Hazard Fact Sheet

DAMP & MOULD GROWTH



Who we are and what we do:

Private Sector Housing are responsible for making sure that properties both owner occupied and privately rented comply with Housing law and standards to protect customers from hazards of poor housing.

To achieve this we will assess dwellings under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System to evaluate any potential risks to health and safety from any deficiencies found. The more common hazards that we come across in dwellings are **damp and mould growth**; excess cold; crowding and space; entry by intruders; personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage; falling on the level; falling on stairs; falling between levels; fire; and structural collapse and falling elements. If significant hazards are identified in privately rented properties which are attributable to the condition of the property, then we may require remedial action by landlords to reduce or eliminate the risk from these hazards.

The intention of our fact sheets is to help you understand what we are looking for, and where possible, to identify areas where landlords and tenants may be able to help minimise or reduce risk.

Health Effects

This fact sheet covers the threats to health associated with mould and fungal growths that result from dampness and high humidity. Damp humid conditions provide an environment in which house dust mites can easily multiply. This can make conditions such as asthma and bronchitis, worse. In addition to the health implications, excessive damp and mould growth can also cause timber window frames to rot, damage to plaster, wallpaper and painted surfaces and damage to tenants property.

Types and causes of damp and mould growth

- Descending dampness – often associated with disrepair to roofs
- Penetrating dampness – possibly through the external walls from leaking gutters or down-pipes etc.
- Rising dampness – where there is either a breach or damage to a damp proof course
- Surface Condensation

In the case of descending, penetrating and rising dampness, the cause is often easy to identify and a suitable solution found. Condensation and its associated mould growth may be easy to identify, but its remedy may not be immediately obvious, and this fact sheet concentrates on this form of dampness.

Condensation

Moisture is produced in dwellings by occupants through their normal biological and domestic activities. Relatively low levels of moisture are generated through breathing and are spread out during the day. However, there are higher levels produced in peaks from cooking, clothes drying and bathing or showering. In our experience, the majority of damp and mould growth enquires we receive are related to condensation problems within dwellings.

Condensation occurs mainly in cold weather, whether it is raining or it is dry, it does not leave a tell tale tidemark. It will appear on cold surfaces, such as windows, tiled areas, toilet cisterns, and areas of the dwelling where there is a lack of ventilation, and little movement of air. It often becomes a problem when mould growth appears. Black mould and mildew can grow on almost any surface including wood, silicone, tiles, floor coverings, paint and paper.



What preventative measures can landlords and home owners take?

Provide suitable ventilation to the property, especially in bathrooms and kitchens.

Ensure that windows in those rooms can be opened, and where possible, provide extractor fans in these rooms. Make sure that your tenants understand how to use fans and open the windows.

Ensure that existing air vents are not blocked, or decorated over, and that trickle vents on windows and doors work correctly.

Ensure your property has suitable cavity wall and loft insulation to reduce the number of cold surfaces where condensation can form. Older properties may require more work in providing additional insulation.

Provide safe and suitable heating in your property with timer and temperature controls and ensure that tenants understand how to use the heating system in your property.

Landlords can also ensure that damp is not being caused by leaking central heating or waste pipes, defective rainwater goods, drains, toilets or a failed damp proof course or rendering. It is also advisable to ensure that the structure of the property is in a sound and watertight condition.

After treating and removing mould, re-decorate using good quality fungicidal paint and a fungal resistant wall paper paste, to prevent mould re-appearing. The effect of fungicidal or anti-condensation paint is destroyed if covered with ordinary paint or wallpaper.

What preventative measures can tenants and owner occupiers take?

Control the temperature of both the air in the property, and the fabric of the building. Air is like a sponge and the warmer it is the more moisture it will hold. Heating one room to a high level and leaving other rooms cold makes condensation worse in the unheated or cold rooms. It is better to have a medium-to-low heat level throughout the property for longer periods of time as, in time; this will raise the temperature of the walls in the property. With thermostat controlled and timer operated central heating systems this is relatively easy to set up. With other systems remember, it is better to have them on for a longer period, but at a lower temperature. The temperature in individual rooms can be boosted as, and when, needed.

If you don't have heat to all the rooms, you could keep the doors of unheated rooms open to allow some heat into them. To add extra heat to unheated rooms, or boost heat in a room, it is better to use thermostatically controlled electric oil-filled heaters or panel heaters, on a low setting, rather than a fan heater

Wipe away excess moisture from windows and window sills and wring out the cloth rather than drying it on a radiator to prevent the removed moisture evaporating back into the atmosphere.

Dry clothes outdoors where possible; if using a tumble dryer, ensure it is a condensing unit or vented to outside.

When cooking keep pan lids on and open kitchen windows or use the extractor fan.

Open windows or use the extractor fan when bathing and showering. Always try to open the windows in bedrooms and living rooms for a while during the day, especially first thing in the morning.

Avoid using bottled gas or paraffin heaters in your property as these can produce up to 4 pints of moisture in 8 hours.

To kill and remove mould, wipe down or spray walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash that carries a Health & Safety Executive (HSE) approval number. Ensure that you follow the instructions for its safe and effective use. These sprays are often available in supermarkets and DIY stores. Dry clean mildewed clothes, and shampoo carpets.

Useful contacts and sources:

Website: <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/privatesectorhousing> - Private Sector Housing pages for Homeowners, Landlords and tenants

Building Regulation Approved Document L1: Conservation of fuel and power in dwellings, and Approved Document F: Ventilation of buildings.

Government Warmfront Scheme Website: homeheatingguide.co.uk/warmfront-grants.html

Energy Saving Trust Website: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk Tel: 0300 123 1234

Private Sector Housing

Colchester Borough Council

Rowan House, 33 Sheepen Road, Colchester CO3 3WG

Telephone: Customer Service Centre on 01206 282581 and select Option 6

Fax: 01206 282598

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