STUDENTS ORGANISING FOR SUSTAINABILITY UNITED KINGDOM

DAMP, CONDENSATION & MOULD

Damp, condensation and mould are the most frequently reported problems with student housing. They're unpleasant to live with and can seriously damage your belongings and negatively impact your health. If you spot this in your home, it's important to tackle the problem as soon as possible. This easy guide will help you understand what damp, condensation and mould are; the signs of them; and how to try to manage them to reduce the negative impacts.

What are damp, condensation & mould?

Damp is when there is excess moisture in a room. There are three types of damp: condensation, rising damp and penetrating damp.

Condensation is what happens when moist air comes into direct contact with a cold surface, creating droplets of water. It is the most common type of damp.

Mould is a fungus that can grow on any surface where there is moisture. If any type of damp (including condensation) is left, it can lead to mould developing.

If left unchecked, damp can:

- Make your house look and smell bad
- Damage your belongings – particularly causing items such as books to curl
- Cause mould on your walls, windows, and doors
- Cause mould to appear, even within your furniture or personal items (particularly fabric ones such as beddings and clothes)
- Negatively affect your health by increasing likelihood of respiratory problems, allergies, or asthma. Vulnerable people are more at risk from this.

Condensation is caused by four things:

- **Producing a lot of moisture** - steam in the kitchen and bathroom, drying laundry
- **Inadequate ventilation** - the moist air can't escape from the home
- **Inadequate insulation** - the home can't retain heat and has cold surfaces
- **Inadequate heating** - cold air cannot hold as much water vapour

Areas prone to condensation:

The following areas are particularly prone to condensation:

- Cold surfaces such as windows, doors, and mirrors
- Outside walls, walls of unheated rooms and cold corners of rooms
- Where large furniture items such as wardrobes and cupboards touch an outside wall (it can form on the wall behind the unit or within the item itself)
- Rooms where there is higher humidity or steam, e.g. kitchen and bathrooms

Condensation can happen at any time of year but is usually most prevalent during the winter months when the weather is much colder.

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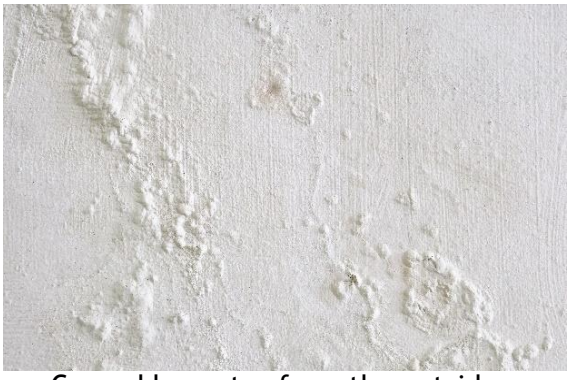
Identifying damp

Rising Damp

- Caused by a failure in floor damp-proofing, causing moisture from the ground to rise up into the property
- Key sign is damp marks rising from the floor/skirting board
- Looks like a 'tide mark'

Penetrating Damp



- Caused by water from the outside finding its way inside
- Usually on ceilings or walls
- Signs on the walls are usually blotchy damp patches or crumbly plaster
- May cause drips and puddles

These are less common than condensation. The cause of these damp types is likely to be beyond the control of the tenant. If you see these signs, contact your landlord to investigate as soon as possible.

Condensation

- Caused by moist air coming in contact with cold surfaces
- Hotspot areas are windows, external doors & mirrors
- Key sign is water droplets forming & sometimes larger pools of water

Mould

- Caused by excess moisture, likely to form in condensation hotspots
- Look for 'spores', small circular 'fuzzy' spots on surfaces
- Usually black but may look green or grey
- May give off a musty smell

Reducing condensation will help reduce the chances of mould expanding through your home. Small amounts of mould can be easily cleaned, although serious cases of mould should still be reported to your landlord. You have the ability to reduce or solve condensation within your home through making small behaviour changes!

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Top tips to reduce damp, mould and condensation in your home

The most common form of damp in the home is condensation, which in turn can lead to mould. We have put together some actions that you can take in and around your home to reduce and manage condensation.

Keep your home warm:

- Try to keep temperatures in all rooms above 15°C. This will cut down the risk of condensation forming on walls and fabrics (it may still form on windows).
- Chose curtains that are thick and heavily lined. This will help keep the room warmer.

Increase the air flow:

- Try and keep trickle vents open all the time. These are small vents built into the frames of modern windows which allow air flow but without a draught.
- If it is safe to do so, try to open all windows wide for a short time every day (around 10 minutes) to help with air circulation.
- Air rooms that are used regularly, particularly bedrooms, as a lot of moisture is produce overnight by breathing.
- Don't block any airbricks or air vents in the building .

Manage the moisture:

- If you spot condensation on your windows or external doors, regularly wipe them down with a sponge or squeegee.
- If you have a condensation 'hotspot', try and get in the habit of wiping it down every morning and evening.

Think about your furniture:

- Try to place large items of furniture against internal walls.
- If you have furniture against external walls, try and leave a gap between the wall and item to allow airflow.
- Avoid over-filling furniture (especially wardrobes) with items so that air can circulate more freely.
- Frequently air out closed items of furniture to help airflow (especially wardrobes, cupboards and chest of draws).

In the bathroom:

- When using a bath/shower, make sure you close internal doors and open windows to encourage air flow and draw moisture out.
- Use an extractor fan if you have one to help draw moisture out.
- If it is safe to do so, leave windows open/extractor fan on for about 20 minutes after a bath/shower.
- Take shorter and cooler showers (this will also help save energy and money).
- When running a bath, put the cold water in first (this results in less condensation).
- Wipe down any tiles or shower screens with a squeegee to remove standing water droplets.

- Hang up damp towels immediately to dry.

In the kitchen:

- When cooking, make sure you close internal doors and open windows to encourage air flow and draw moisture outside.
- Use an extractor fan if you have one, to draw out the water vapour produced from cooking.
- Put lids on pans when you are cooking on the hob to catch the steam (this also reduces cooking times and saves energy).
- Only boil as much water as you in need in a kettle or saucepan to reduce the steam.

Washing & laundry:

- Try to dry clothes outside if possible.
- If you need to dry clothes inside, it's important to increase the airflow of the room to help to moisture escape. You can do this by:
    - Using an airer to separate damp clothing items
    - Flip clothes at least once to help even drying and prevent moisture build up in folds
    - Close internal doors and open windows to help air circulate
    - Avoid putting clothes directly on radiators as it prevents heat circulating, use a radiator drying rack instead
    - Consider using a dehumidifier to help draw the moisture out and speed up the drying process

Dealing with mould

If you manage to keep on top of the condensation in your home, it should reduce the chances of mould appearing in your home. If you do have a small amount of mould present, it is possible to clean it yourself, if you feel comfortable doing so, with an anti-fungicidal wash which carriers a Health & Safety Executive approved number. However, you should report all instances of mould to your landlord.

Tenant and landlord responsibilities

It is important to remember that as a tenant you are responsible for any damage you cause to a property you are renting. Any repair costs could be taken from your security deposit – this could include condensation damage if it is due to tenant negligence, as you are expected to ventilate and heat your home properly.

If you are taking action to reduce condensation and are still noticing damp, you must report it to you landlord to identify if there are any underlying problems causing this.

We recommend keeping a note of the repairs needed (we recommend taking photos, too), the impact on your health and any damage to furniture and belongings.

Landlords are responsible for removing mould and fixing underlying damp problems. Landlords also have a responsibility to ensure there is sufficient ventilation in a property and should notify tenants of potential condensation issues at the start of the tenancy.