

Factsheet



Condensation

What is condensation?

Every home gets condensation at some time - it forms when warm moist air and steam are produced. During cooking, washing cloths and bathing etc the warm air comes into contact with and condenses on a cold surface before it can leave the building.

It is quite normal for you to find your windows misted up in the morning after a cold night and there is nothing much you can do to stop this, however, sometimes condensation can become a more serious problem. Cold surfaces such as outside walls, glass and even furniture and clothing can become damp and black mould might grow.

What can you do?

There is no immediate and easy solution. You need to balance four main factors:

Factor 1 - Heat

Cold areas in the home can be avoided, as these are the places where condensation can occur, so whole home heating is best. You will get less condensation if you keep your home warm most of the time, insulation is one of the most effective ways of achieving this.

- Heating systems and controls should be used efficiently. Your local energy supplier may be able to provide further information.
- Try to leave some background heat on during the day in cold weather. Most dwellings take a long time to warm up and it may cost you more if you try to heat it up quickly in the evening.
- Putting a settee up against a cold wall will not allow the room heating to warm up the cold wall and may well lead to condensation and mould growth behind the settee.



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Factor 2 - Ventilation

Before the 1960s houses generally did not have central heating but tended not to suffer from condensation. They did however have a lot of natural background ventilation.

Older houses didn't have double-glazing and had poorly fitting windows, instead of central heating there were draughty fireplaces, they also tended not to have carpets, so there was no restriction of air movement up through the floorboards.

Nobody likes draughts, but some ventilation is essential if condensation is to be controlled.

- In winter open windows for short periods of time each day. Outdoor winter air is much drier than indoor air and opening the window allows the warm moist air to escape and dry air to enter.

If you fit draught strips leave a small space for air to get through.

- Don't block up air bricks and vents. In fact blocking up air bricks, flues or ventilators can be dangerous if you use certain types of heaters and gas central heating boilers.
- Open windows during cooking, after a bath or when glass is misted up to let out more moisture, but remember to close them again.
- Never block up chimneys completely. If you are blocking up a fireplace fit an air vent to allow some ventilation.
- Avoid pockets of undisturbed stagnant air, for example, behind wardrobes and in cupboards.

Factor 3 - Insulation

- Loft insulation will cut the heating bills and keep your home warmer for longer.
- Draught proof the windows and external doors (remember to still let some ventilation through).
- Walls can be insulated by filling the cavity with some ventilation material, or by dry lining with insulation board to warm up cold surfaces. A suitably qualified contractor should always install cavity wall insulation and a Building Control Notice may be required, improper insulation of electrical wires within the cavity can cause a fire.
- Double-glazing can be fitted - but there must still be adequate ventilation of the room. Modern double glazing to comply with Building Regulations is fitted with trickle vents.



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Factor 4 - Moisture Reduction

The more moisture produced in your home, the greater the chances of condensation. In some homes 1.7 litres of water can be produced daily.

- Drying clothes inside produces a lot of moisture, so always dry outside if possible. If you have to dry clothes indoors, use the bathroom with the window open and the door shut.
- Make sure that tumble dryers are properly ventilated to the outside.
- Portable gas or paraffin heaters produce a lot of moisture. 1 pint of paraffin produces 1 pint of water. If you use these heaters you will need a lot more ventilation.
- Close the bathroom and kitchen doors whilst cooking and bathing and open a window in that room. The warm moist air can then escape through the window and is prevented from travelling to another, perhaps colder, part of the house.

You can carry out some of these measures at very little cost. However, if you are a tenant you may need the permission of your landlord.

If the above points are followed, condensation should not be a persistent problem in your home, however you must remember that a balance is needed between the four factors and you may need to experiment and persevere until the problem is resolved.

Further help and Advice

If you are entitled to certain benefits or are over 60, grants are available under the HEES (Home Energy Efficiency Service) scheme for loft insulation and draught proofing. You can contact HEES on telephone number 0800 072 0150.

