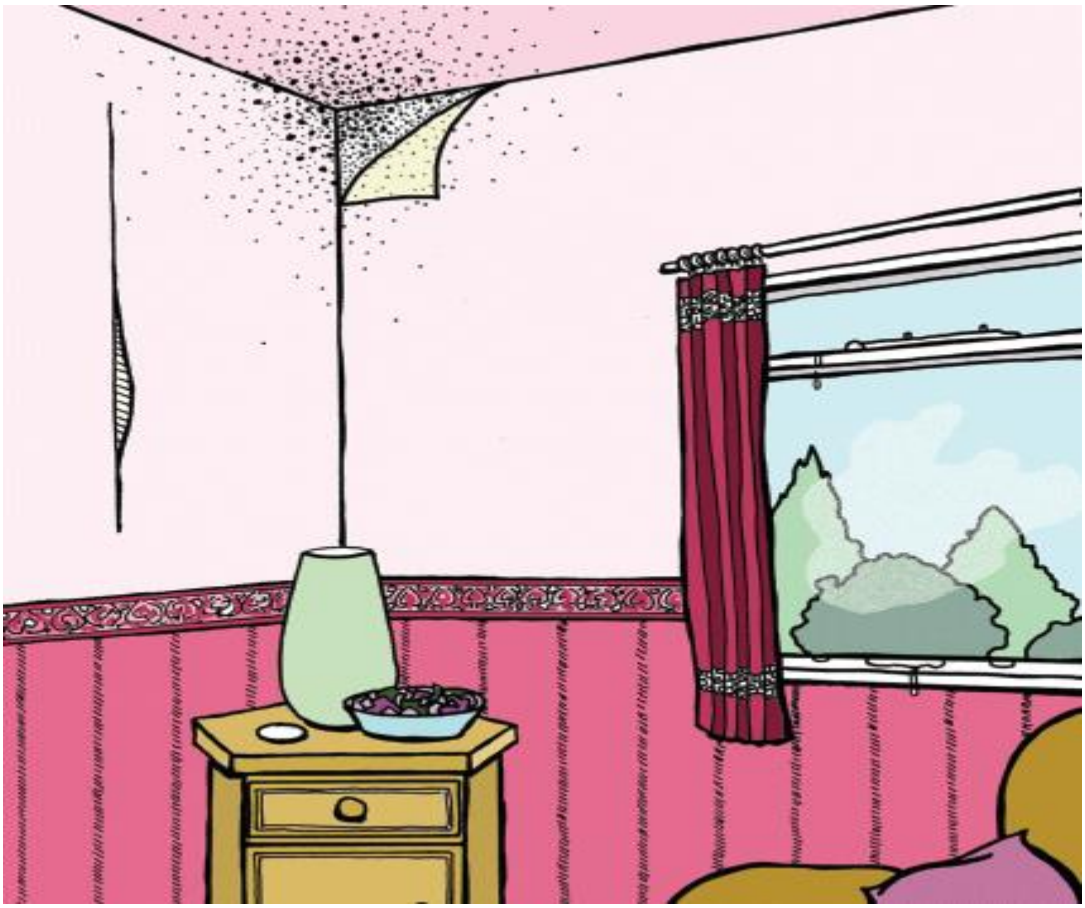
CONTROLLING CONDENSATION AND MOULD – A LANDLORD'S GUIDE



Newham London

INTRODUCTION

A large number of complaints are received by Newham Council every year, specifically relating to condensation and mould growth in the home. These complaints are especially frequent between September and April when the weather is colder and the problems more easily noticeable.

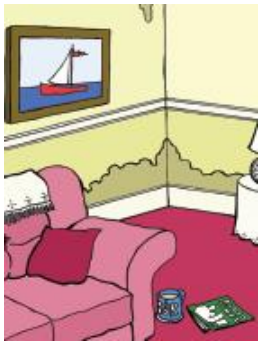
This leaflet is designed to give landlords and agents a clear explanation of what condensation is, what causes it, and what remedies there are. This includes problems leading to mould growth in properties.

Unfortunately, all too often, it can be easier to give wrong advice when condensation and mould growth occurs; or to simply blame occupant behaviour for causing the problem in the first place, rather than taking time to see why the problem has started and, more importantly, how to deal with it. This leaflet aims to dispel some of the myths, give real practical advice and help landlords and agents deal with condensation and mould growth.

The Council already has a thorough Condensation and Mould leaflet for tenants, which we routinely provide to tenants to assist them with steps they can take. This leaflet now fills the remaining gap, by giving landlords and agents proper advice on what they can do as well.

1. WHAT IS CONDENSATION?

There is always moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. The amount of moisture depends on everyday activities of the occupiers. If air gets cold, it cannot hold all the moisture produced and some of this moisture appears as tiny droplets of water, most noticeable on windows on a cold morning. This is condensation. It can also be seen on mirrors when you have a bath or shower, and on cold surfaces such as tiles or cold walls.
It is not always visible especially on surfaces such as wallpaper. Condensation dampness occurs in cold weather, even when the weather is dry and this problem is different from rising damp, leaks and water penetration dampness from outside.



It doesn't leave a 'tidemark' round its edges on walls. If there is a 'tidemark', this dampness might have another cause, such as water leaking into the property from a plumbing fault, loose roof tiles or rising damp.
Look for condensation in your property. It can appear on or near windows, in corners, often behind curtains and, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards.
Condensation forms on cold surfaces and places where there is little movement of air.

Problems that can be caused by excessive condensation

Dampness caused by excessive condensation can lead to **mould growth** on walls and furniture, **mildew** on clothes and other fabrics and the **rotting** of wooden window frames. Also, damp humid conditions provide an environment in which **house dust mites can easily multiply**. The presence of mould and dust mites **can make existing respiratory conditions such as asthma and bronchitis worse**. Condensation mould often appears as small black dots as in this picture.

First steps against condensation

Your tenant will also need to take proper steps to deal with condensation; meanwhile, there are some simple things they should do straight away.
Follow the suggestions in the pictures, the ***do's (✓)*** *and* ***dont's) (X).***

- ❖ Dry the windows and window-cills every morning, as well as surfaces in the kitchen or bathroom that have become wet.
- ❖ Wring out the cloth rather than drying it on a radiator.

First steps against mould growth

First treat the mould already in the property, then deal with the basic problem of condensation to stop mould reappearing.

To kill and remove mould, wipe down affected areas with a bleach and water solution, or spray walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash (make sure it carries a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 'approval number'). Ensure that you follow the instructions for its safe use. These fungicidal washes are often available at local supermarkets and many DIY stores. Dry-clean mildewed clothes, and shampoo carpets. Do not try to remove mould by using a brush or vacuum cleaner.
After treatment, redecorate using good-quality fungicidal paint and a fungicidal resistant wall paper paste to help prevent mould recurring. The effect of fungicidal or anti-condensation paint is destroyed if covered with ordinary paint or wallpaper.

But remember: the only lasting cure for severe mould is to get rid of the dampness.

2. WHAT CAUSES CONDENSATION?

There are four main factors that cause condensation:-

I. **Too much moisture being produced in the property.**
II. **Not enough ventilation.**
III. **Cold surfaces.**
IV. **The temperature in the property.**

You need to look at all of these factors to cure a condensation problem.

3. TOO MUCH MOISTURE BEING PRODUCED IN THE PROPERTY

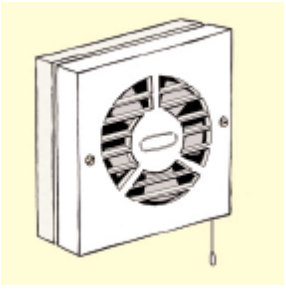
Our everyday activities add extra moisture to the air inside our homes. Even our breathing adds some moisture (remember breathing on cold windows and mirrors to fog them up?). One person asleep adds half a pint of water to the air overnight and at twice that rate when active during the day. However there are certain activities that release more moisture, such as cooking and bathing, which can contribute. Drying clothes indoors releases relatively large volumes of moisture into the air and controlling this is important.

For the most part your tenants will be responsible for ensuring that this factor is adequately dealt with. The tenant's guide has advice for them to minimise the amount of moisture produced in the home. The key point is for them to control how much extra moisture is released into the air; this includes avoiding drying clothes inside, or if they have to, to dry them in a ventilated room with the door closed but some other ventilation available e.g. hang clothes in the bathroom with the door closed and a window slightly open or extractor fan on.

4. VENTILATION OF THE HOME

As moisture is released into the air this needs to be controlled by adequate ventilation. Your tenants can help to **reduce condensation that has built up overnight by 'cross-ventilating' the property** - opening to the first notch a small window downstairs and a small one upstairs. (They should be on opposite sides of the house, or diagonally opposite if the property is a flat). At the same time, **open the interior room doors**, this will allow drier air to circulate throughout your home. Cross-ventilation should be carried out **for about 30 minutes each day**.

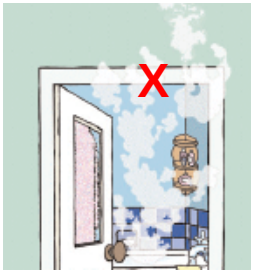
Note: Make sure that accessible windows will not cause a security problem – window locks should be provided as a matter of routine.



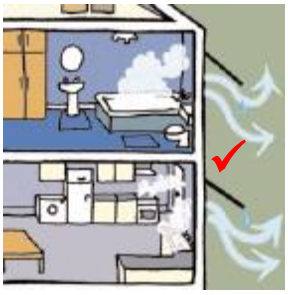
As the bathroom(s) and kitchen are two main locations where excess moisture is produced it is always recommended that extractor fans are installed as a matter of routine to these locations. Cooker hoods which just remove grease via filters and are not ducted to the outside air are not suitable for controlling moisture in kitchens.

Your tenants will need to ventilate the kitchen or bathroom when cooking, washing up, washing by hand or bathing. You can ensure that this is the case by ensuring that any extract fan(s) are wired into the same circuit as the light switch, allowing it to come on automatically when the light is switched on in that room. They should continue for a period after the light is switched off (an over run), usually for an extra 15 minutes. They do not use up much electricity and are very economic to run.

Additionally tenants can be advised that a window slightly open is as good as one wide open. Some newer windows have vent locks where the window can be locked securely in a slightly open position to provide vital background ventilation. Having a window wide open in cold weather will reduce the temperature in the property and make the problem worse. Windows only need to be open an inch or so (just over 2cm).
You should consider upgrading the windows so that they can be left ajar but still be inaccessible from outside; ideally window handles should also have window locks to prevent intruders and giving tenants peace of mind to leave the windows open in the locked ajar position.



Keep kitchen and bathroom doors closed to prevent moisture escaping into the rest of the house.
Ventilate bedrooms by leaving a window slightly open at night and ensure the trickle vents on the windows are open permanently (if fitted).



5. COLD SURFACES IN YOUR PROPERTY

Condensation forms more easily on cold surfaces in the home, for example walls and ceilings. In many cases, those surfaces can be made warmer by improving the insulation and draught-proofing.

Insulation and draught-proofing will also help keep the whole house warmer and will cut the fuel bills. When the whole house is warmer, condensation becomes less likely.
Loft and cavity wall insulation are the most effective forms of insulation.
If you install any draught-proofing, observe the following guidance.

- Do not draught-proof rooms with a condensation problem, or where there is a heater or cooker that burns gas or solid fuel.
- Do not block permanent ventilators or airbricks installed for heating or heating appliances.
- Do not draught-proof bathroom or kitchen windows.

In some instances, rooms with large external areas (e.g. back addition rooms with two or three walls not being internal walls) will be very difficult to heat up effectively as the heat is lost easily through the walls. It may be necessary to have extra insulation fitted. This can be either by dry lining the walls – a layer of insulation fitted to the interior of the walls, or by external cladding – an external insulating render or panel of insulation fitted to the exterior.

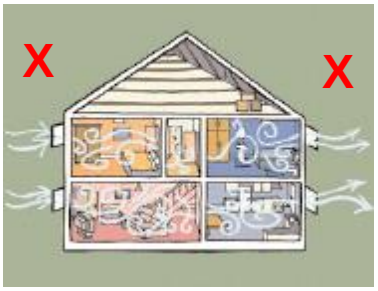
6. THE TEMPERATURE OF THE PROPERTY

Warm air holds more moisture than cooler air, which is more likely to deposit droplets of condensation around the property. Air is like a sponge; 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 rooms**. A short burst of high level heating only warms up the room's air temperature. **Low or medium level heating over a longer period will heat the air temperature and the fabric of the house, such as the walls**. Once heated the fabric will retain some of the added warmth, which in turn will reduce the time and amount of heat needed in warming the room up the next time. Heating controls such as thermostats and timers should be provided to ensure that your tenants have adequate levels of heating in the right places at the right times, which can also help reduce heating bills.

The most cost effective and efficient method of heating is gas central heating. Where there is a mains gas supply to the property the expectation is that full gas central heating will be provided.

- **Keeping the heating on at low all day in cold weather will help to control condensation**.

- **Be careful not to 'over-ventilate' the property when it is cold**, as it will cause the temperature inside to drop and make condensation more likely. It will also increase the heating costs, i.e. windows need not be left wide open to ventilate, just a small opening will be sufficient and will help prevent excessive heat loss. See Section 4 above for advice about windows and ventilation.



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