

Report to Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee 26th October 2011

Service - Housing

Subject: Black Mould

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1. Executive Summary

BLACK MOULD

Black mould in the home and buildings is usually a direct consequence of condensation.

CONDENSATION

Condensation is water which has “condensed” from air on contact with cold surfaces. Running water on windows and walls is usually the first and most obvious sign of condensation in the home. It will occur whenever warm, moist air comes in contact with a cold surface or when the air becomes saturated with water vapour as in bathrooms. Condensation may not be so obvious to most people except for mist and water droplets on windows. However, the appearance of telltale black and coloured spots and stains will soon follow – this is called mould growth. In most buildings it is condensation which creates the conditions suitable for the growth of black mould. Uncomfortable and unpleasant, the appearance of mould growth is often seen first on window frames. Black mould can occur much more seriously on walls, wallpaper, furnishings and fabrics. Condensation and black mould can damage walls, timbers and much more. The conditions which encourage these problems can often make life unpleasant and uncomfortable.

IS MY HOME AT RISK

Every home could be susceptible. Ironically the emphasis on improving insulation, and the way we heat and ventilate our homes, has created exactly the right conditions for increasing condensation and black mould. In other words we have cocooned ourselves in our homes, excluding natural and artificial ventilation and created moist, warm air which eventually leads to condensation somewhere within the property. Kitchens and bathrooms are areas most susceptible to these problems, where a lot of steam is produced.

It is probably true to say that practically every home in Britain is susceptible to condensation and then black mould.

FIRST CONDENSATION - THEN BLACK MOULD

What can be done?

In theory all condensation and black mould problems can be eliminated by the use of proper heating, ventilation and insulation. This, of course, is easier said than done and ignores the economic realities of life. There are, however, some simple and inexpensive ways of reducing the overall condensation problem in the home and dealing with the black mould and only the resident can carry these out as follows:-

- Limit moisture production in bathrooms
- Limit moisture movement from these areas by keeping doors closed
- Use background ventilation throughout, such as through vents and air bricks
- Ensure each room can be ventilated adequately
- Ensure existing heating system is working effectively. Maintain some low heating even if accommodation is unoccupied during the day and particularly in cold weather
- Ensure tumble dryers and washing machines can be exhausted directly to the outside
- Avoid use of paraffin or bottled gas heaters (one litre of paraffin produces over one litre of water)
- Apply proven fungicidal and anti-condensation coatings in mould infected areas or where mould is likely to occur

REDECORATION WHERE MOULD HAS OCCURRED

The council will use treatments such as the use of Biokil Crown Anti Mould range of specialist coatings or similarly approved that will break the mould problem and give prolonged control against its recurrence if used and applied correctly. The Biokil Crown Anti Mould range of specialist coatings or similarly approved, are no more difficult to use than conventional paints, have been used for over 40 years in hospitals, breweries and restaurants as well as being used in many houses throughout the country. The products have been tried and tested time and time again. This treatment or other similarly approved should not be covered with conventional paints or wallpaper. The Anti Mould Emulsion used carries a 5-year warranty.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD THE LANDLORD DO?

The landlord is responsible for ensuring that there are no repairs that may be causing or contributing towards dampness and condensation that can cause black mould spores to form, such as water leaks/ingress. It is also regarded as good practice for the landlord to help the tenant to combat condensation as it occurs. It is prudent for any landlord to encourage tenants to properly ventilate and heat their homes and for our part to be seen to be supporting them by way of producing handy advice leaflets, and by inspecting properties that report dampness and condensation in order to recommend the most practical and cost effective way to reduce the amount of condensation being produced.

Other prevention methods should also be employed where practicable such as the fitting of extractor vents and fans, preferably with humidistat control, in kitchens and bathrooms where most condensation occurs.

We can also break the mould problem by the application of anti mould coatings such as:-

- MOULD WASH STERILISING SOLUTION CONCENTRATE
- ANTI MOULD EMULSION
- ANTI CONDENSATION COATING
- MOULD ERADICATION ADDITIVE

It may also be necessary for landlords to review their stock condition regularly to ensure that they are being used appropriately and that any improvements necessary are being carried out and that in general they are being properly maintained. If this does not happen then it is likely that improvements could be recommended not based upon the actual requirements of the stock but moreover on the direct recommendations of local officers who think that by installing double glazing for instance that this is the necessary best course of action to improve the property. This action could in fact have an adverse affect on the insulation levels inside the property that could lead to an increase in levels of condensation.

It is always best to seek professional advice and to review the requirements of the property in conjunction with the expectations of residents when considering improvements, and for proper and accurate information to be made available to residents before improvement programmes are considered.

The life of a building may be extended in terms of sustainability but at what cost.