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Water Damage Repair Guide Fix Leaks & Moisture Problems

Family Circle Articles

"Does Your House Leak, Seep or Drip? Say Goodbye To Water Worries"

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Troubled by ceiling leaks and mildew on walls? Here's how to rid your home of irritating "waterfalls."



Repair Charts

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- Mildew Problems

More than half the letters we receive from FAMILY CIRCLE readers who need home-repair advice complain of moisture and water problems. For instance, Ann R. from Clarksville, Tennessee, asked us what to do about moisture streaks on her dining room walls. Gordon M. of Atlanta, Michigan, had another dilemma: leaking windows. To help Ann, Gordon and all our other readers who are plagued by water problems, we've got the solutions.

Most dampness troubles in the home stem from three major causes:

- faulty construction
- improper maintenance
- lack of awareness about the tricks humidity, vapor and condensation can play on your home.

By learning what moisture is normal and what isn't, you will be able to spot the real-and costly-water worries in your house. For example, sometimes all you have to do to solve damp-wall problems is install insulation. However, other times you may have to repair a leaky pipe or roof.

To help you end leaking, dripping and seeping in your home, we prepared this easy-to-follow clip-out chart. It shows you how to diagnose the causes of your water troubles and tells you what steps to follow to treat them. In many instances, we also suggest preventive measures you can take to avoid future leaks. Most of the remedies are so simple anyone can do them; others require some do-it-yourself skills, and a few jobs, such as waterproofing a basement or repairing a leaky roof, may require professional assistance.

Prevent Water Damage In The Home

Listed below are helpful tips to identifying and fixing problems caused by water leaks and moisture in the home.

Walls & Woodwork

Problem:	Cause:	What To Do:

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Moisture on inside surface of exterior walls.	Caused by cold weather; not enough insulation.	Insulation needed. Vapor barrier needed on inside surface of exterior walls.
Plaster or sheet-rock erosion.	Caused by plumbing or rain leak, or no vapor barrier.	Repair leak area. Install or apply vapor barrier to inside surface of exterior walls.
Foundation walls wet.	High humidity in basement, or outside of foundation isn't water-or damp proofed.	Install a dehumidifier. Apply damp proofing compound to inside face of foundation.
White powder on foundation wall.	Lime or salt deposit, called efflorescence.	These deposits can normally be brushed away; then apply damp-proofing compound to inside face of foundation.
Wallpaper peeling in bathroom or kitchen.	Caused by high humidity. Ruins wallpaper; causes erosion.	Open windows to ventilate area. Install ventilator fan, if there is none. Reglue wallpaper if there is no fungus, mold or bacteria. If there is, first wash down wallpaper with detergent ammonia and gently rinse.
Leakage under window.	Unit not pitched properly or not draining properly.	Repitch unit to drain outside. Check for blocked or leaking air conditioner condensate drain.
Grid-like dirt marks on ceilings & walls.	Lack of insulation.	Install insulation. Install vapor barrier. Wash with strong detergent, such as washing soda, and repaint walls & ceilings.
Ceiling on top floor has water stains.	Attic or cockloft not properly ventilated.	Lower the relative humidity by ventilation. Attics & crawl spaces require at least two ventilator-louvered openings. Attic should have 1 or 2 square feet louvers for every 300 square feet of space. Crawl spaces should have 1 or 2 square feet louvers for every 150 square feet of space. Place 5 mil plastic over crawl space floor.
Water stains or leaks on ceiling after snowfall.	Ventilator in attic not working properly or is wrong type.	Install new & louvered attic ventilator designed for snow reflection.
Inside wood trim or flooring rotting; outside wood rotting.	Caused by a plumbing or rain leak, or no vapor barrier.	Find and repair leak area. Install or apply vapor barrier. Treat wood with disinfectant, such as cuprinol or creosote. Fill rotted areas with commercial wood fillers or repair.
Rotting of eaves & wood trim at roof.	Caused by a leak from gutter or from roof.	Clean, repair and/or install gutters & leaders. Repair roof.

Basement Areas

Problem:	Cause:	What To Do:
Basement leaking or flooded.	Many possible causes: Improper soft grading. Gutters & leaders blocked. Underground dry wells overflowing. Substrata high water table. Broken piping. Sewer backup. Washing machine overflow or hose leak. Outside faucet leak. Areaways (basement window wells and/or stairwells) blocked.	Regrade outside earth, sloping soil away from foundation. Clean & repair gutters & leaders. Clean dry wells and/or build new ones. Clean & maintain areaways. Waterproof foundation and/or install sump pump, with under-concrete-floor drainage piping. Repair leaking pipes or washing machine hoses. Close or repair outside hose faucet. If these measures don't work, call a reputable waterproofing contractor.

Window Problems

Problem:	Cause:	What To Do:
Mist on inside surface of outside storm windows.	Outside temperature below dew point. This is normal, indicates storm windows are working.	Routinely check "weep holes" for proper drainage.

Problem:	Cause:	What To Do:
Frost on inside surface of outside storm windows.	Outside temperature below freezing. This is normal, indicates storm windows are working.	Routinely check "weep holes" for proper drainage.
Mist on inside surface of windows where there are no storm windows.	Outside temperature below dew point. May cause leakage, rot and wastes energy.	Install storm windows.
Frost on inside surface of windows where there are no storm windows.	Outside temperature below freezing. May cause leakage, rot and wastes energy.	Install storm windows.
Mist on inside surface of windows with storm windows.	Temperature below dew point between inside & storm windows. May cause leakage & rot.	Reset storm windows. Check for loose screws, openings, missing weather stripping. Check if storm windows are tightly closed into top & bottom track and properly caulked on top & sides.
Frost on inside surface of windows with storm windows.	Temperature below freezing between inside & storm windows. May cause leakage & rot.	Reset storm windows. Check for loose screws, openings, missing weather stripping. Check if storm windows are tightly closed into top & bottom track and properly caulked on top & sides.
Leakage & plaster erosion under windows.	Lack of caulking, or blocked or missing "weep holes" at bottom of storm windows.	Reapply caulking around window frames. Drill two to three small "weep holes" along bottom edge of storm windows for drainage.

Home Interior Plumbing

Problem:	Cause:	What To Do:
Pipes sweat.	Only happens on cold water pipes; plumbing not faulty, just needs to be insulated.	Measure the width and length of pipe to be insulated. Buy pipe insulating kit and wrap plumbing per manufacturer's instructions.
Leak in area around bathtub, shower (and possibly in room below).	Possible causes: Loose and/or missing tiles. Crack in shower bottom. Lead pan shower, bottom leaks.	Reapply grout and/or reset all tiles. Repair all leaking pipes. Replace and/or repair shower bottom.
Leak around toilet bowl.	Possible causes: Wax ring at base of bowl, deteriorated. Cracked bowl. Cracked tank. Tank sweats. Water in tank is always running. Pipe fittings leak.	Reset bowl with new wax ring. Replace cracked bowl or tank. Insulate inside of tank or connect hot water mixing line. Adjust flushing mechanism in tank. Repair pipe fittings.
Toilet tank sweats.	Caused by cold water in tank and high moisture in bathroom. Tank lacks insulation.	Drain tank completely and thoroughly dry inside tank with toweling. Buy 1/2" thick Styrofoam board & cut to line inside of tank. Attach with silicone adhesive. Allow to dry for several hours. Refill tank.

Mildew Problems

Problem:	Cause:	What To Do:
Fungus or mold on bathroom tile.	High moisture content in air.	After bathing, open window or turn on exhaust fan to ventilate area. Wash tile with bleach & rinse with clean water.
Fungus or mold on interior surface of walls & ceilings.	Possible causes: High moisture content in air. No insulation. Unvented clothes dryer. No ventilator in kitchen. Steam radiator valve leak.	Reduce relative humidity. Install a dehumidifier. Fix steam radiator by changing air valve. Vent clothes dryer to the outside. Insulate house. Install ventilator in kitchen. Disinfect walls & ceilings before painting or applying wallpaper.

Problem:	Cause:	What To Do:
Mildew in closets.	Closets lack ventilation.	Install louvered doors on closets.
Fungus or mold on exterior outside wall surfaces.	Possible causes: No vapor barrier. Area shaded and always damp. Leaking roof gutters. No roof gutters.	Install vapor barrier. Wash surface with bleach & detergent. Cut back shrubbery & trees. Fix roof gutters or install gutters. Before painting, disinfect walls with antiseptic cleaning solutions, such as chlorine bleach or washing soda.



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