

Helpful Homeowner Hints Series

Protection from water damage



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Protect your home from water damage.

Water is necessary for survival. However, for a house, water can be a destructive force that can lead to wood rot, peeling paint, insect infestation, shorter lifespan of roofing and siding and higher maintenance costs.

Investigate, identify and repair all leaks and cracks.

The best way to prevent water damage from rainwater and snowmelt is to ensure the exterior materials of the home are properly constructed and maintained. The following are tips for identifying and eliminating sources of water intrusion into your home.

- **Windows and doors:** Check for leaks around your windows and doors, especially near the corners. Check for peeling paint; it can be a sign of water getting into the wood. Inspect for discolorations in paint or caulking, swelling of the window or doorframe or surrounding materials.



- **Roof:** Repair or replace shingles around any area that allows water to penetrate the roof or sheathing. Leaks are particularly common around chimneys, plumbing vents and attic vents. To trace the source of a ceiling leak, measure its location from the nearest outside wall and then locate this point in the attic using measuring tape. Keep in mind that the water may run along

the attic floor, rafters or truss for quite a distance before coming through the ceiling.

- **Foundation and exterior walls:** Seal any cracks and holes in external walls, joints and foundations; in particular, examine locations where piping or wiring extends through the outside walls. Fill all cracks in these locations with sealant.
- **Plumbing:** Check for leaking faucets, dripping or “sweating” pipes, clogged drains and faulty water drainage systems. Inspect washing machine hoses for bulges, cracks or wetness. Replace them every few years or sooner if problems are found. Inspect the water heater for signs of rust or water on the floor.



- **Termite-damaged material:** Check for termite damage in wood materials such as walls, beams or floors. Any wood exposed to the exterior can potentially lead to moisture intrusion or termite infestation.

Prevent water damage through good home maintenance.

You can help prevent future leaks and water intrusion by regularly inspecting the following elements in your home and making sure they remain in good condition.

- **Flashing:** Flashing, which is typically a thin metal strip found around doors, windows, thresholds, chimneys and roofs, is designed to prevent water intrusion in spaces where two different building surfaces meet.

- **Vents:** All vents, including clothes dryer, gable vents, attic vents and exhaust vents, should have hoods, exhaust to the exterior, be in good working order and have boots.
- **Attics:** Check for holes, air leaks or bypasses from the house, and make sure there is enough insulation to keep interior heat from escaping. Among other things, air leaks and inadequate insulation can result in ice damming. If ice dams collect around the lower edge of a roof, rain or melted snow can back up under the shingles and into the attic or into the house. Check the bottom side of the roof sheathing and roof rafters or truss for water stains.



- **Basements:** Make sure that the basement windows and doors have built-up barriers or flood shields. Inspect sump pumps to ensure they work properly. A battery backup system is recommended. The sump pump should discharge as far away from the house as possible.
- **Humidity:** The relative humidity in your home should be between 30% and 50%. Condensation on windows, wet stains on walls and ceilings, and musty smells are signs that you may have too much humidity in your home. Check areas where air does not easily circulate, such as behind curtains, under beds and in closets for dampness and mildew. Be sure to use bathroom exhaust fans following warm showers or baths. When going on trips, turn the temperature up on the air conditioning system to help remove moisture from your home. If you are concerned about the humidity level in your home, consult with a mechanical contractor or air conditioning

repair company to determine if your HVAC system is properly sized and in good working order.

- **Air Conditioners:** Check drain pans to insure they drain freely, are adequately sloped toward the outlets and that no standing water is present. Make sure drain lines are clean and clear of obstructions. Drain pan overflows usually occur the first time the unit is turned on in the spring. Clean prior to first use with compressed air or by pouring a water-bleach solution down the drain line until it flows freely.
- **Expansion joints:** Expansion joints are materials between bricks, pipes and other building materials that absorb movement. If expansion joints are not in good condition, water intrusion can occur. If there are cracks in the joint sealant, remove the old sealant, install a backer rod and fill with the new sealant.
- **Exterior wood sheathing and siding:** Replace any wood siding and sheathing that appears to have water damage. Inspect any wood sided walls to ensure there is 8" between any wood and the earth.



- **Drywall:** Since drywall is an extremely porous material and is difficult to dry out completely, damaged areas should be replaced if any signs of moisture are present. One way to protect drywall from moisture intrusion in the event of a flood is to install it slightly above the floor and cover the gap with molding.

- **Irrigation:** Inspect and adjust the spray pattern of the irrigation heads to minimize the water sprayed directly onto the house to avoid excessive water near the foundation.



Act quickly if water intrusion occurs.

If water intrusion does occur, you can minimize the damage by addressing the problem quickly and thoroughly. If water is flowing into the home from burst piping or damaged appliances, shut off the water supply, typically found outside the house or at the meter. Immediately remove standing water and all moist materials, and consult with a licensed building professional who can determine the extent of the repairs necessary. Water damage left unattended can result in structural failure and mold growth.

Should your home become damaged by a catastrophic event such as fire, flood or storm, take appropriate actions to prevent further water damage once it is safe to do so. This may include boarding up damaged windows, covering a damaged roof with plastic sheeting or removing wet, damaged rugs, carpet or personal belongings. Fast action on your part will help minimize the time and expense for repairs, resulting in a faster recovery.

Many of the damages associated with these events may be covered under a homeowner insurance policy. See your local AAA Insurance Agent for details.

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