

Musty Mould & Rusty Rot

What you need to know to prevent water damage, dry rot and mould

Water damage is something Brisbane Maintenance Experts sees almost daily. When detected early, a water leak may not cause much damage at all, and never really become a problem. In many cases though, a water leak and the subsequent damage it causes aren't detected for quite some time. This gives the affected area plenty of time to grow bacteria, mould and other nasties. So, what are these nasties and how can they be prevented?

Dry Rot

Dry rot is essentially the result of water leaks and the subsequent damage to the structure of your home. In many ways then, the term 'dry rot' is really a misnomer. Technically, dry rot refers to the strand of fungus which destroys wood and causes significant damage. Decay fungi will easily attack untreated wood if it is in direct contact with the ground, concrete or any other source of moisture like rain seepage, plumbing leaks or condensation. The most important thing to remember here is that wood which is kept clean and dry will never decay!

So where might we find dry rot? A good example is a fridge that "sweats" or even leaks moisture in the kitchen. A small plumbing leak under the sink which could go unnoticed and unattended for long periods of time can also lead to significant dry rot. Bathrooms and laundries are also key places to watch for dry rot. Unfortunately for the unsuspecting home owner, when dry rot and structural damage are present, it is usually a pretty good indicator that mould is present as well.

Mould

Black mould is the most common type of mould that you will encounter around the home. Mould will grow anywhere that is dark and humid, and only needs oxygen, moisture, the right temperatures and a food source for growth. Black mould feeds on cellulose, and this is found in all wood products and by-products. Considering that most homes in Queensland are made on timber structures (and some older homes are made entirely of timber), your whole house may eventually be at risk of mould and subsequently, dry rot. We spend a lot of time worrying about termites and termite prevention in Queensland – and rightly so, but it is important to bear in mind that mould and/or dry rot can have just as devastating effects on the structure of your home.

Black mould usually grows in dark nooks and crannies, so this is a significant contributing factor as to why it often goes undetected. Mould is usually discovered when there is visible interior damage, but by this stage it is usually too late to prevent any serious damage and cost. The cost of replacing entire walls, floors and subfloors can be huge, so getting on top of damage quickly is important. Not only is cost an issue with mould, but it can also have potentially serious (even fatal) health implications for you, your family and even your pets. So what do we need to look out for to stop mould and dry rot in their tracks?

Preventing Mould and Dry Rot

The most important thing to remember when trying to prevent mould and dry rot is to act *quickly*. To be able to do this though, you need to be aware of what to look out for. If you notice any areas of moisture, damage, high humidity and/or odd musty smells in your home, then you need to go into damage control mode! This can involve calling a professional to try to determine the cause of the leak/moisture, and then contacting a professional drying company to try to lessen any further damage. To summarise, you need to:

1. Locate and eliminate the source of water that is causing and feeding the dry rot/mould
2. Promote and continue to maintain rapid drying conditions

Depending on where the water source is located, there are different courses of action that could be taken:

- **Under the house**

Good ventilation under a house and in crawl spaces is essential to preventing moisture and mould. Plumbing leaks can also be a significant problem under the home, so plumbing in these sorts of areas should be checked and maintained regularly.

- **Inside the house**

Plumbing leaks are again one of the most common sources of trouble inside the home. Plumbing leaks are often only small and go unnoticed for long periods of time, which is why they can potentially cause so much damage. The best way to prevent this kind of disaster is to be proactive and check for plumbing leaks on a regular basis. Make this part of your monthly home maintenance checklist! As with plumbing leaks, roof/ceiling leaks can also go undetected and cause problems with rot and mould long term. Ensure there is adequate ventilation in ceiling space, bathrooms, the kitchen, the laundry and any other areas that tend to promote moisture.

- **Outside the house**

The outside of your home is like an envelope – it protects the contents! Because of this, sealing the envelope is critical! Ensure that your house is sealed with quality paint regularly, and ensure all windows and doors are properly sealed as well. Check your roof regularly for leaks, broken tiles, and blocked down pipes which might cause water to stop draining effectively. If water starts to build up on the roof, it will eventually try to make its way inside.

So, if you do discover dry rot and mould the most important thing to do is act quickly! Painting over mould may make it look better in the short term, but it will not actually remove the problem. Instead, it will trap the bacteria and allow it to grow and cause more structural damage. Calling the experts and having them assess and treat the cause of the problem is the only way to deal with dry rot and mould. For the sake of your home and your health, don't let musty mould and rusty rot get the better of your home! Be proactive and keep on top of water damage, rot and mould!

Sources:

- *Hometown Exterior Designs LLC*
- *Do It Yourself, Alden Smith*
- *Morgan Services Inc.*

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