

Condensation is often misdiagnosed as penetrating damp, so if your block has a damp problem, it is important to confirm or eliminate condensation first.

Condensation tends to be a seasonal issue and so there is a condensation season, which is typically from September to March, though this is changing as we are seeing higher temperatures in September. Warm air holds more moisture than cold air. When warm air is cooled, such as when the heating is switched off at night, it may deposit the water vapour that it can no longer retain, as condensation, onto a cold surface.

There is more than one type of condensation. *BS 5250: Code of practice for control of condensation in buildings*, gives four different types:

1. Surface condensation – this is the most commonly found.
2. Interstitial condensation – occurs within or between the layers of the building, such as the underside to a cold deck roof.
3. Reverse condensation – a form of interstitial and occurs to southern facing walls that get sunlight after a wet period.
4. Radiation condensation – another form of interstitial, which occurs when there is rapid heat loss by radiation on a clear, cold night.

Mould is often an indication of condensation but a lack of mould does not rule out condensation and visa-versa. If residents in a block you manage have a damp problem then the first step is to recommend that leaseholders follow this advice during the colder months which may confirm condensation is the problem or help to eliminate it.

- Avoid drying washing indoors. If there is no option, then use a room with an open window and close the door to the rest of the flat.
- When bathing or cooking ensure all doors are closed to other parts of the flat, open a window and turn on extractor fans – clean fans regularly and make sure they are in working order. Consider upgrading the fan if it is old.
- In bedrooms, make sure trickle vents are in working order and leave them open. We exhale up to 500ml of water during the night –nearly a pint's worth! Maintain adequate working and opening windows. If a window is stuck closed, call out a window specialist to ease and repair.
- Recommend that residents maintain a constant general level of heat in their flats during the colder months. Low to mid heat levels are ample when no one is home. This can then be increased in the evening avoiding sudden bursts of heat, though this does rely on having a thermostatically controlled heating system. The aim here is to ensure the air and building fabric temperature are elevated during times of colder weather.

If these easy action points don't help, then it is worth using service charges to commission a surveyor to investigate further. They will have a multitude of tools at his/her disposal: moisture meters, hygrometers and even salt testing kits. They will be able to determine whether your block's damp problem is due to condensation or to another form of water ingress, such as penetrating damp.