

Maintaining the inside of your home

Guidance for homeowners



Housing and Constituencies

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Your handy guide

This leaflet provides guidance for homeowners on how to keep the inside of your home in good condition.

We have other leaflets providing useful tips. These include one about keeping your home safe, one about keeping the outside in good condition and one about saving energy. Just ask us if you'd like a copy of any of them or you can find them on our website.

If you can't manage any of the work yourself or don't have the time, don't worry - we can help you find reliable contractors, whether you need a plumber, an electrician, a builder, a roofer or any other tradesperson.

This is just one of a range of services we provide to homeowners in Birmingham through our Homeworks team. We offer impartial advice and practical assistance to help you make your home a better place to live in so if you have any questions, please call us.

You will also find useful information sheets on a wide range of home maintenance tasks in any large DIY store or you might want to buy a good quality DIY book.

If you rent your home from the council your tenants' handbook and your repairs handbook have information about home maintenance.

Decorating and plastering

Decorating is a job that many people are willing to tackle, even though some might enjoy it more than others!

Having a well decorated home will help to add to its value and make it a much nicer place to live in, whereas poorly prepared paintwork and badly matched wallpaper will stand out like a sore thumb.

There is a huge range of advice and information available through DIY and decorating shops, but here are a few tips for making a good job of decorating your home:

- leave plenty of time for preparation - this is the most important part of the job
- mistakes can be expensive so make sure you bring samples of paint and wallpaper home before you buy to see what they will look like against things you don't intend changing
- always follow the manufacturer's instructions when you use paint and make sure you use a good quality primer and undercoat before you put on the top coat of gloss or emulsion.

If you remove any old wallpaper you might find cracks or loose areas of plasterwork underneath, especially if you have hammered in nails to put up pictures. If the cause isn't obvious, you need to find out why the damage happened and sort the problem before

trying to repair it. Damp and subsidence can all cause problems with your plaster. You can fill small cracks yourself but if you're not sure why the plaster is damaged, you should contact a professional plasterer.

Condensation and damp

You need to tell the difference between condensation and damp because it affects how you deal with the problem.

Condensation - this is water that forms when damp air hits a cold surface. Washing, cooking, drying clothes and even breathing all put water into the air inside your home. In just one day, the average family makes about 11.3 litres (20 pints) of water vapour. This vapour stays in the air in warm rooms but turns back into water when it touches cold surfaces like windows or bathroom walls.

If you don't deal with condensation problems, the water formed could damage your home and even your health.

Moisture can cause your doors and window frames to rot. It also provides the ideal conditions for mould to form, especially mildew, which causes black patches on wallpaper and fabric.

Some mould spores can be bad for your lungs and cause breathing problems. You can't see these spores because they are a microscopic dust.

Damp - this is water getting into your home from above (because of a leaky roof, for example) or rising up from the ground through the floors or walls.

Damp from above can be caused by water overflowing from blocked gutters, damaged flashing (this is the covering for the joints where a roof and wall meet), cracked roof slates or freak weather.

Damp rising from the ground can be caused by soil piled up next to walls, a damaged damp proof course (or maybe your home has never had one), hard surfaces like paths draining towards the house, leaks from plumbing and heating systems, or blocked drains.

You can tell the two problems apart with these simple checks:

	Condensation	Damp
What are the telltale signs?	Pools or drops of water. These can lead to patches of mould forming - these will have blurred, soft edges	Stain marks, also a damp, musty smell if the problem is inside
Where will I find it?	Inside your home, usually on cold surfaces like walls, windows or water pipes	Inside or outside your home on walls, floors or brickwork
When is it worst?	Usually damp weather	Usually wet weather

How to prevent condensation

In most cases you can get rid of any water you are putting into the air just by opening a window. Here are a few other tips:

Do

- keep the bathroom door shut - open the window after a bath or a shower
- put lids on your saucepans when you're cooking to stop steam escaping
- cook with the kitchen door closed and the window open
- dry clothes outside if possible
- make sure your tumble dryer is vented properly to the outside, or buy a condensing type
- make sure that air bricks and double glazing vents are clear
- make sure that your roof space is properly ventilated.

Don't

- use a paraffin or Calor gas heater to dry clothes - they give off a lot of water and fumes that are potentially dangerous in enclosed spaces
- block up a fire place without fitting an air vent to the chimney flue
- ignore any leaks - they'll only get worse and cost you more to repair.

You could also improve the insulation of your home to help cut down on condensation - see the section on insulation for more information.

How to prevent damp

Do

- repair your damp proof course if it is damaged or have a new one put in
- clear any soil away from the walls of your house to keep the damp proof course clear

- clean out air bricks at least once a year - it's important to keep the holes in them clear because they ventilate the spaces above and below your floor
- make sure any paths slope away from your house
- fit extractor fans in your kitchen and bathroom
- open windows when you're cooking or washing

Don't ignore

- blocked or missing air bricks
- outside paintwork that is damaged or unpainted
- rotten or leaking windowsills
- blocked or broken guttering
- loose or missing roof slates
- old chimneys falling apart.

Getting these problems fixed now will save you money in the long run.

You will find other tips on keeping your damp proof course in good working order in our leaflet called 'Maintaining the outside of

your home'. You might also qualify for grants to help pay for some of the work - see the next section on insulation.

Insulation

Insulating your home will save you money, help to stop pipes and water tanks from freezing, and help prevent damp or condensation. We have plenty of information available on the different sorts of insulation available in our leaflet on how to save energy.

You might also qualify for grants to help pay for some of the work - visit www.energysavingtrust.org.uk to find out more. This includes information about a government scheme called Warm Front which provides grants to help private home owners. For more information, visit www.warmfront.co.uk or call 01905 501808.

Floor rot

Floors are often neglected and it can take several years for any problem to get so bad that you notice anything is wrong.

Floors can become unsafe because of wet rot, dry rot or an attack by insects (usually woodworm). Wet rot is common but you are less likely to get dry rot.

To spot any rot, look out for these signs:

- Floors that start sloping towards a wall
- Mouldy smells

- Floors springing up and down when you step on them
- White or yellowy mould that looks like cotton wool - with dry rot, you will also see long white strands which spread through bricks if the fungus is well established
- Crumbly or brittle wood
- Holes that appear in skirting boards and nearby furniture.

Beware - dry rot is a very serious problem and can eventually spread to wood some distance from where it first started. As it can spread through brickwork, it could even damage the structure of your home.

You can tell the two types of rot apart with these simple checks:

	Wet rot	Dry rot
What is it?	Wood becoming soft and decomposing because it keeps getting wet	A type of mould which needs the right conditions to grow
What are the telltale signs?	Wood that darkens and becomes soft like a sponge	Wood that cracks across the grain, also a musty smell

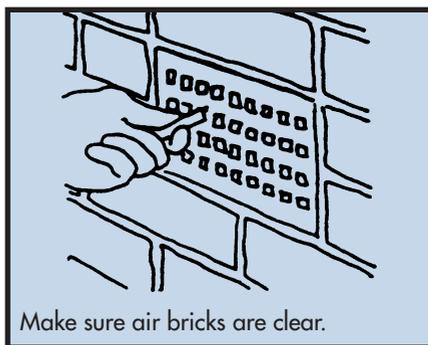
What causes it?	Wood getting wet and drying out, again and again	Damp wood and poor air circulation
What can I do about it?	Find out where the water is coming from and sort the problem. The rotten wood will then need to be cut away and replaced	Sort out the damp and ventilation problems. The affected area will have to be cut out and sterilised - this work is best left to an expert because it involves chemical treatment

Woodworm are insects whose young eat wood before they fly off in May, often to lay eggs on more wood. You will usually find them in soft wood like pine and often in plywood.

You can't really stop the adult insects getting into your home. The best protection is to inspect your furniture and floorboards regularly. If you see tiny holes in any of the wood, the chances are it is woodworm. You can buy wood preservative to treat the affected areas but be careful as it could be toxic so you must follow the manufacturer's instructions on the container.

How to prevent rot

This is how you can stop rot - whether it is wet or dry - happening:



- lift your lino and carpet every so often to have a look at the floor for any telltale signs
- keep rooms dry and well ventilated - this is especially important to prevent dry rot

- clean out air bricks at least once a year
- clear anything that might stop your damp proof course from working properly - move rubbish, soil or large plants away from the walls of your home
- make sure any paths slope away from your home - or put in a drain that takes surface water away from the walls
- always paint or protect wood as soon as you can and never leave it bare over the winter.

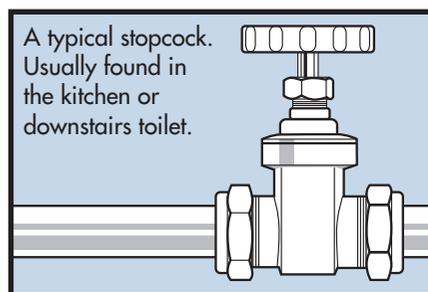
Plumbing

The pipe that brings water into your home from the water main in the street is called the rising main. Drinking water and electric showers should be connected to a pipe connected to the rising main.

Most houses also have tanks in the loft known as cold water cisterns. They provide water for toilets, immersion heaters and bathroom taps. The rising main fills these tanks.

To stop these tanks overflowing, they are fitted with a ball valve similar to the one in your toilet cistern. This valve shuts the water off when the correct level is reached.

How to turn the water off



You will usually have two taps - called stopcocks - which are used to shut off the water within your home.

One stopcock will be found where water is piped into your home - usually in the kitchen or the downstairs toilet. The second one will be in the street under a metal cover - you might share this with your neighbours.

Before any problem happens, make sure you know where the stopcocks are in your home and check that they are working.

Remember - if you can't turn the stopcock, don't force it as the tap might need replacing. If the stopcock is jammed, you'll need to get advice from a plumber.

You must drain the entire system if you are working on the cold water systems in your home. It is not enough to turn the water off at the main because you will still have water in the pipes. You can clear these by flushing the toilet or running the cold water taps - remember to turn them off after you have finished the work.

DIY tips

Leaking taps - these can be easily repaired at very little cost. Don't ignore a constantly dripping tap as you could ruin it if you keep on forcing it shut.



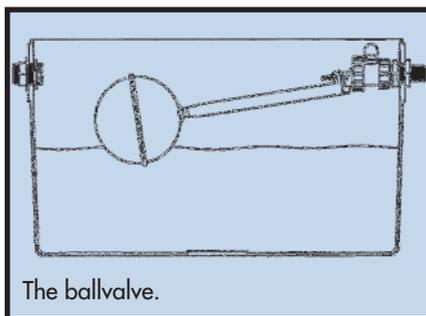
If the tap leaks from the spout, you will need a new washer.

If the tap leaks from the handle, you will need to replace the U ring or take it out and put it back in again.

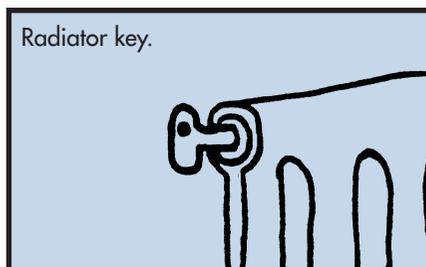
Replacing a tap washer - this is a quick job but how you do it will depend on the type of tap you have. Information sheets from a large DIY store or a DIY book will guide you. Whichever method you use, you must turn the water off at the stopcock and run the taps first to get rid of any water still in the pipes. Don't forget to turn the water back on when you've finished.

Leaking overflow pipes - your cold water cistern will usually be fitted with an overflow pipe which goes through an outside wall to just below the eaves of your roof. Water will only drip out when you have a problem with the tank. Don't ignore the overflow as it is warning you of a bigger problem. The dripping water can also damage brickwork and cause damp.

Ball valves - the ball valves in your toilet cisterns and water tanks float on the surface of the water and close a valve when the level is correct. If your toilet won't flush properly or your overflow pipe is leaking, you may have a problem with the ball valve. Common problems include holes in the ball which causes it to sink or grit in the valve caused by a worn washer.



Noisy radiators - most radiators become noisy at some point because air gets into the system. It's a simple job to let the air out using a radiator key you put into the air vent found at the top of all radiators. The trick is to open the vent only slightly - remember to have a cloth or a towel handy to catch any water that spurts out.



If you think you can do it yourself, don't forget:

- you should only carry out plumbing work if you are completely confident that you know what you're doing - if not, get a plumber to do the job for you
- radiators contain hot water that can burn - take care when you are releasing air out of radiator vents
- the radiator water might be dirty and can stain your walls and flooring.

Burst pipes

Burst pipes are one of the most dramatic household emergencies you are likely to face. The damage caused by water running through your home can be very expensive to repair.

Burst pipes are caused by:

- accidental damage
- cold weather.

If you haven't insulated your pipes properly, they can split if the water inside them freezes. When the ice melts, water will then pour into your home - and the damage will be far worse if you're not there when it happens.

What to do if a pipe bursts

Do

- Be prepared and know where your stopcock is
- Go straight to your stopcock and turn off the water supply
- Find where the leak is coming from:

- if the water is coming from the ceiling, drain the system by running all taps and flushing toilets
- if the leak is in a fitting that screws together, try tightening it up
- if the pipe has split or you have hammered a nail into it, repair the piece of pipe - you can buy a burst pipe kit from a plumber's merchant.

Don't

- Panic - stay calm
- Try any repairs yourself unless you are certain you are competent to do them
- Forget that water can damage electrical fittings - get a qualified electrician in and have your home checked before you use any electrics, including lights.

Remember - emergency plumbing repairs can be very expensive. Try to use someone you know or who has been recommended to you. If this isn't possible, check whether the plumber makes a call out charge and ask how much the job is likely to cost.

Tips to avoid burst pipes

The most likely places to freeze are lofts, outside toilets and kitchens, and all have plenty of water pipes.

Do

- Use a pipe detector before you drill a hole or hammer a nail into the wall - this is an easy to use tool you can buy from DIY stores
- Insulate hot water pipes as well as cold ones - see the next section on insulation
- Use expanding foam to insulate places that are hard to reach - you can buy this in an aerosol from DIY stores

- Buy and fit roof insulation and pipe lagging at the same time - the roof insulation will stop heat escaping into your loft but this will only make your pipes more likely to freeze if they aren't insulated too
- Consider leaving the outside toilet light on, using an energy-saving bulb, during freezing weather - it only gives out a little heat but it might be enough to stop a burst pipe
- Fit thermostatically controlled valves to your radiators to help prevent a severe drop in temperature.

Don't

- Forget that water pipes can run under the floor, not just up walls - they can freeze just as easily as others so you might have to lift the floorboards to reach them
- Put loft insulation underneath your cold water cistern - it needs the heat rising from your home to stop the water freezing.

Tips for good insulation

It's a quick and simple job to insulate your pipes. You can buy foam tubing - just choose the size that matches your pipes and follow the fitting instructions.

For more information about insulation and other ways of saving energy and cutting your fuel bills, please read our leaflet giving useful tips on how to cut your fuel bills. You might also qualify for grants to help pay for some of the work - visit www.energysavingtrust.org.uk to find out more.

Drains

A drain is a pipe that takes waste water from your home. When it joins other drains, it becomes a sewer.

Inside your home, you can help prevent drain problems.

Never put these things down drains or toilets:

- disposable nappies
- cotton buds
- plastic bags
- leaves and rubbish
- oils and fat
- food scraps.

How to unblock a sink

The pipe under your sink has a trap in the U bend - this stops smells from the drain rising up the pipe into your home. Often things get caught in this bend and block the sink.

If this happens:

- try a sink plunger
- if that doesn't work, put a bucket under the trap to catch any water and unscrew the access cap. Then use a piece of wire to poke around until you find the blockage and can pull it out into the bucket.

For information about outside drains and who is responsible for them, please read our leaflet called 'Maintaining the outside of your home'.

How to contact us

We provide a wide range of services and help for homeowners. For more details:

- ring our Homeworks helpline on 0121 303 1116
- email us at homeworks@birmingham.gov.uk
- visit our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/housing for more information or to fill in an enquiry form
- write to us at Homeworks, Birmingham City Council, Housing and Constituencies Directorate, PO BOX 11415, Birmingham B11 1ZB

Money worries? Let us help

If you are worried about money or want to find out if you can claim any benefits, please tell us. Your neighbourhood office is there to help and can give you advice and information that may make all the difference to your financial situation.

For more information please contact your local neighbourhood office. birmingham.gov.uk/neighbourhoodoffices

This is important. If you do not understand this document then please ask a friend or relative, who speaks English, to contact your local neighbourhood office or housing team on your behalf. We will then arrange for an interpreter to meet with you.

هذه الرسالة مهمة، فإن لم تفهمها نرجو أن تطلب من أحد أصدقائك أو أقرباك ممن يتكلمون الإنجليزية أن يتصل بمكتب
الحي "تيرهود أوفوس" المحلي أو فريق الإسكان نيابة عنك. بعد ذلك سنرتب اللقاء بك مع وجود مترجم فوري.

ARABIC

এটা খুবই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। আপনি এই দলিলটি বুঝতে না পারলে দয়া করে ইংরেজীতে কথা বলতে পারেন এরাপ আপনাদের একজন বন্ধু-বান্ধব বা
আত্মীয়কে আপনার পক্ষ হয়ে আপনার স্থানীয় নেইবারহুড অফিস বা হাউজিং টিম এর সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করতে বলুন। এরপর আমরা আপনার সঙ্গে
সাক্ষাৎ করার ব্যবস্থা করব এবং এতে সহায়তার জন্য একজন ইন্টারপ্রিটার রাখা হবে।

BENGALI

此事極為重要，如果你看不懂這份文件，請找一位會講英語的親戚或朋友代你
接觸當地的鄰舍辦事處或房屋服務隊。然後我們會安排傳譯員一起見你。

CHINESE

این اطلاعات بسیارمهم است. اگرمحتوی این مدرک را نمی فهمید، لطفاً ازیک دوست یا خویشاوندتان که به زبان انگلیسی صحبت کرده میتواند
خواهش کنید که ازطرف شما بانیرهود آفس یا هوزنگ تیم محل شما تماس بگیرد. بعداً برای شما مترجم فراهم می کنیم که باشما ملاقات کند.

FARSI

આ બાબત અગત્યની છે. જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજમાં લખેલી બાબત ન સમજાય તો કૃપા કરી કોઈ અંગ્રેજી બોલતા મિત્ર અથવા
સગાસંબંધીને તમારી સ્થાનિક નેબરહુડ ઓફિસ અથવા હાઉસિંગ ટીમનો તમારા વતિ સંપર્ક સાધવા વિનંતી કરો. પછી કુબાધિયા
સાથે તમને મળવાની અમે વ્યવસ્થા કરીશું.

GUJARATI

ਇਹ ਗੱਲ ਬੜੀ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਹੈ। ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪਰਚ ਦੀ ਸਮਝ ਨਹੀਂ ਲੱਗਦੀ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਅਪਣੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਬੋਲਣ ਵਾਲੇ
ਦੋਸਤ ਜਾਂ ਰਿਸ਼ਤੇਦਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਕਹਿ ਕੇ ਉਹ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਸਥਾਨਕ ਨੇਬਰਹੁਡ ਔਫਿਸ ਜਾਂ ਹਾਊਸਿੰਗ ਟੀਮ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੇ। ਉਸ ਤੋਂ
ਬਾਅਦ ਅਸੀਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੋਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਗੱਲ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ।

PUNJABI

داویر مهم معلومات دی. کہ تاسی پہ دی سند نہ پوهیږی نو مهربانی و کړی دخپل بوملگری یا خیلوان نه چه په انگریزی ژبه خبری کولای شی غوښتنه و کړی چه
سناسی له خوا سناسی دیمی نیرهود آفس یا هوزنگ ټیم سره په تماس کی شی. بیا به مونږ ترجمان برابر کړو چه سناسی سره کتنه و کړی.

PUSHTO

Tani waa muhiim. Hadii aadan fahmaynin warqadan fadlan waydiiso ruux saaxiibkaa ama
qaraabadaada ah oo af ingiriiska ku hadla inuu kuu waco xafiiska Dariska (Neighbourhood Office)
ama kooxda guryaha asagoo adiga kumatalaya. Markaa Kadib Ayaan kuu balaminaynaa Turjubaan.

SOMALI

یہ دستاویز اہم ہے۔ اگر آپ اس دستاویز کو سمجھنے سے قاصر ہیں تو براؤ کرم انگریزی زبان سے واقف اپنے کسی دو - یا رشتہ دار سے کہنے کہ وہ آپ کی
جانب سے آپ کے مقامی نمبر ہوؤ آفس یا ہاؤسنگ ٹیم سے رابطہ کریں۔ ہم پھر آپ سے ملاقات کرنے کیلئے ایک ترجمان زبان کا انتظام کریں گے۔

URDU

Đây là việc quan trọng. Nếu quý vị không hiểu tài liệu này làm ơn nhờ bạn hay người thân biết nói tiếng Anh
thay mặt cho quý vị liên lạc với đội nhà của hoặc văn phòng nhà của ở địa phương của quý vị. Chúng tôi sẽ
thư xếp một thông dịch viên đến gặp quý vị.

VIETNAMESE

If you would like this leaflet in large print, Braille, or on
audio cd or tape, please call 0121 303 1116.