

The Big Drip: Interior Moisture Management

Moisture management inside the house is a critical part of homeowner maintenance. In order to maintain the house structure, reduce problems, enhance the homes durability and value, and reduce potential for mold growth, you need to maintain the moisture control systems of your house. Last month I wrote on exterior moisture problems and systems, this month I will explain interior moisture control.

Crawlspaces are a major cause of moisture in the home. Periodically check for moisture in the crawlspace. Excessive humidity from leaking plumbing pipes, standing water or condensation are all problems that can effect indoor air quality and lead to mold growth. Ideally you will have a thick plastic covering over the earthen floor of the crawlspace. This is called a vapor barrier; it should be thick enough to be puncture and moisture resistant. This vapor barrier will help limit evaporation of moisture from the soil into the crawlspace

Like crawlspaces you should periodically inspect kitchen, bathroom and utility sink drains and supply lines. Even small leaks unchecked over time can lead to damage of cabinets, counters, walls and flooring, and lead to mold growth. I've noticed that the plastic drain line connections tend to become loose over time. When you are inspecting under the sinks give the connection a good hand tightening. You should not use tools on the plastic pipes as they are likely to crack if you use too much force. If you find leaks make sure to promptly repair them. Mold can start growing within 72 hours of the leak.

When bathing remember to use the bath fan for ventilation. This will greatly reduce mold and mildew growth in the bathroom. Make sure the bath fan is vented to the exterior of the house. I find many fans that are vented into the attic, this was a common construction practice in the 1960's and earlier. If the bath fan is exhausting into the attic, the warm moist air will condensate and cause damage to the roof structure. It will also reduce the effectiveness of the insulation and lower its R-value. If you do not have a bath fan and only have an operable window for ventilation, remember to open the window. You may also consider adding an exhaust fan for additional and more convenient ventilation.

As I said earlier it only takes a small leak to create a big problem, with that in mind keep the caulking and grout at bathtubs, showers, and countertops maintained. Latex caulk is common and it comes in white, tan and many other colors. Some latex caulk has sand in it and is designed to match the color and texture of grout. This is a good product to use at tile surrounds and backsplashes. Most latex caulk tends to shrink when it cures and will eventually crack. Another caulking option is silicon, this too

comes in colors, but the choices are limited. Silicon caulk is a stronger product and tends to last longer.

Dryer vents should be exhausted to the exterior of house. Dryers exhaust a lot of moisture, if they are allowed to vent to the interior of the house it will likely cause condensation on the interior of the windows. This condensation can damage the window sills and drywall, and lead to mold growth.

Indoor air quality and mold can have negative effects on your health, especially the young and people who already have breathing problems. Maintain the moisture in your home and everyone will breathe easier.