



Circle Voluntary Housing Association

Managing Dampness, Mould and Condensation Policy

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1. Our Values

The actions we take underpin our vision to make a difference by providing quality homes for people in housing need. At Circle Voluntary Housing Association (VHA), we firmly believe that how we interact with our tenants, communities, colleagues and stakeholders is of fundamental importance. Our passionate commitment to caring about our tenants and the services we deliver has led to the development of our core values - six behaviour-based principles that speak directly to the characteristics we hold high.

WE HEAR

Willingness to embody all our values in a driven manner.

Empowerment of our staff and tenants.

Honesty allows for complete understanding, it aids in the delivery of integrity and putting our tenants' best interests at the heart of our decision-making.

Excellence reminds us of our continuous strive to be better.

Accountability benefits all, transparency will foster this, and the creation of solid and reliable documentation will ensure that this accountability is enforced.

Respect is the foundation of these values, without respect for ourselves, others and the service we provide we must ask ourselves why we put so much of our valuable time into the job we do.

2. Policy Statement

This policy sets out Circle VHA's approach and response to reports of dampness, mould and condensation within our tenants' homes. We are committed to making our vision a reality for our tenants and making a real difference by providing quality homes and services.

Circle VHA aims to:

- Provide a quick, efficient and cost-effective responsive repairs and maintenance service in order to provide tenants with homes that are safe and well maintained.
- Listen to our tenants, provide them with advice and tools to help them maintain their home.
- Take every report of damp, mould and condensation seriously.
- To assess, plan and action the works that are required to address dampness, mould and condensation, within reasonable timescales.

All responsive repair works are carried out by our contractors in line with this policy. We will take a strategic approach to ensure that repairs to homes relate to current maintenance needs, deliver

value for money, and are directly influenced by our tenant's feedback. All repairs will be carried out within the following agreed timescales once access has been agreed:

- Emergency - Within 24 hours.
- Urgent - Within 5 working days.
- Routine - Within 20 working days.

All reports of damp, mould and condensation will be treated as an Urgent repair.

3. Equality Statement

Circle VHA is committed to equality and diversity. We work hard to provide homes and services that meet the needs of diverse communities. We will provide training for our staff on equality and diversity to ensure that individuals are not discriminated against for reasons of:

- Gender
- Civil status
- Family status
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Membership of the Traveller community.

4. Data Protection

Circle VHA takes its data protection responsibilities very seriously and is compliant with all current data protection legislation.

For further information, please refer to our *Data Protection Policy* located on our website.

5. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Circle VHA:

- Provide homes which are safe and of a high standard; that offer a warm, comfortable, and healthy living environment for our tenants.
- Recognise that parts of our stock portfolio can be more susceptible to condensation and possible damp related issues.

- Recognise many homes in Ireland are affected by damp. Where there is overcrowding, a lack of appropriate heating, ventilation and insulation, tenants can experience a substantially higher proportion of condensation and mould.
- Ensures our staff are clear on the objectives of Circle VHA regarding responsive repairs arising from damp, mould or condensation and are provided with appropriate training.
- Complies with statutory obligations, regulatory standards, and best practice.
- Has in place comprehensive management systems to allow Circle VHA to control, analyse and improve the service.
- Measure tenant satisfaction and learn from feedback to continuously improve the service.
- Provides a prompt and efficient response to repairs arising from damp, mould or condensation.
- Achieves high standards of performance from our contractors.
- Has a more purposeful approach to the prevention, treatment and remediation of these issues that will benefit our tenants. Our tools will include better data, improved reporting and identification of dampness, mould and condensation, end-to-end tenant service with better joined up advice, guidance and support, and preventative tools.

6. Scope

This policy applies to tenants of all Circle VHA owned properties and where Circle VHA provide tenancy management services on behalf of other owners.

Where Circle VHA are not the owners of the property, the responsibilities of Circle VHA and the tenant are clearly stated in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Circle VHA and the owner.

The tenancy agreement that the tenant signs will clearly state the relevant policies that the tenant is legally obliged to abide by.

This policy refers only to responsive repairs arising from dampness, mould and condensation, not cyclical or planned maintenance. All other responsive repairs are referred to in our Responsive Repairs Policy.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibility for the approval of this document lies with the Board of Directors and CEO of Circle VHA.

It is the responsibility of the Leadership Team to authorise adjustments to policies, procedures and forms, and ensure they are effectively implemented and ensure appropriate budget is in place for training where necessary.

It is the responsibility of the Management Team to ensure that policies, procedures and forms are effectively and consistently implemented within all departments and to arrange appropriate training for staff where necessary.

It is the responsibility of all staff to consistently implement policies and procedures, as per the terms and conditions of their employment and to undertake appropriate training where necessary.

8. Legislation

Circle VHA complies with all legislative requirements and regulations, and sector performance standards. Specific policies, legislation and/or standards referred to within this document are listed in the References section.

9. Glossary

9.1. Glossary

AHB	Approved Housing Body.
CEO	Chief Executive Officer.
DPC	Damp Proof Course.
LA	Local Authority.
SLA	Service Level Agreement.
TSO	Tenancy Services Officer.
VHA	Voluntary Housing Association.

9.2. Definitions

Condensation	Water droplets that appear on cold windows or other surfaces, as a result of humid air or steam becoming cool.
Dampness	The fact or state of being slightly wet, especially in a way that is not pleasant or comfortable.
Mould	A soft, green or black growth that develops on ceilings, walls and other surfaces in areas that may be poorly ventilated.
Responsive Repairs	Is a maintenance activity where we restore something damaged, faulty, or worn to a good condition in response to a report. This type of repair is also known as reactive, routine or day to day repairs.

10. Repairs Responsibilities

A breakdown of responsibilities for repairs arising throughout a tenancy can be found in our Responsive Repairs Policy and in the Tenant Handbook. If a tenant is unsure who is responsible for a repair in their home, contact should be made with Circle VHA's Customer Services Team who will be able to assist in determining who is responsible for the repair.

Tenants can report repairs in several ways, including to our out of hours service where an emergency repair arises. Repair reporting is outlined in full in the Responsive Repairs Policy.

11. Contributory Factors of Damp, Mould and Condensation

11.1. Fuel Poverty

It is recognised that fuel poverty is a major factor in cases of condensation which can lead to mould problems when tenants are unable to afford to heat their home effectively.

11.2. Cold Bridging

Cold Bridging can be found in many areas including poorly installed cavity wall insulation for example. Where a gap occurs in the insulation this can cause areas to become colder, which would then be at risk of increased condensation.

11.3. Blocked or broken ventilation

This would include blocked solum or air bricks and broken window trickle vents.

11.4. Broken extractor fan

Where possible, all kitchens, bathrooms and utility rooms should have a functioning extractor fan.

11.5. Radiators

Heating systems performance is not always at the standard required to prevent condensation. Radiators may be undersized for the room volume and can be located on internal walls creating colder external walls.

11.6. Missing/damaged render or pointing on brickwork

There could be various reasons for poor or broken pointing (i.e., the finish between bricks) on parts of a brick wall which may have created cold spots for condensation and penetrating damp. The same can also be true with damaged render systems.

11.7. Leaking Guttering

Guttering can, over time, corrode, warp or sag causing leaking joints. Lack of effective maintenance can result in blocked or choked gutters and downpipes that can, through time, cause damage to the fabric of the building.

11.8. Leaking Roofs

This could be caused by many things i.e. damaged or missing tiles, damaged flashing, roof vents or chimneys, blocked gutters or simply that the roof is approaching the end of its serviceable life.

11.9. Unvented and condensing tumble dryers

These can produce excessive amounts of water vapour in the property, encouraging condensation.

11.10. Management of the home

Excessive humidity within the home and the lack of adequate ventilation are the primary causes of condensation. Drying clothes on space heaters, cooking with lids off pans, and over-crowding all add to the moisture levels within a property.

11.11. Bottled Gas Heaters

The use of Bottled Gas Heaters is not permitted as they pose a Health and Safety risk, as per Tenancy Agreement 4.22.

11.12. Rising Damp

Rising damp can occur where there is missing or ineffective damp proof course or where a high ground level breaches the damp proof course.

12. Four Main Categories of Dampness

12.1. Penetrating Dampness

This type of dampness will only be found on external walls or, in the case of roof leaks, on ceilings. It only appears because of a defect in the structure of the home, such as missing pointing to the brickwork, missing roof tiles, loose flashing or leaking gutters. These defects then allow water to pass from the outside to the inner surfaces. Penetrating dampness is far more noticeable following a period of rainfall and will normally appear as a well-defined 'damp patch' which looks and feels damp to the touch. "Tide marks" will be left, even in periods of dry weather.

12.2. Defective Plumbing

Leaks from water and waste pipes, especially in bathrooms and kitchens, are relatively common. They can affect both external and internal walls and ceilings. The affected area looks and feels damp to the touch and stays damp whatever the weather conditions outside. An examination of the water and waste pipes in the kitchen and bathroom and the seals around the bath, shower and sinks will usually find the problem. In cases when leaks are not attended to, rot may become established in wooden joists and floorboards leading to a risk of collapse in severe cases. Mould may be seen with this type of dampness and even fungi are not uncommon if the defects are not addressed.

12.3. Rising Dampness

This is caused by water rising from the ground into the home. The water gets through or around a defective damp proof course (DPC) or passes through the natural brickwork if the property was built without a DPC. Rising damp will only affect basements and ground floor rooms. It will normally rise no more than 36 inches above ground level (900mm) and usually leaves a 'tide mark' low down on the wall. You may also notice white salts on the affected areas. Rising damp will be present all year round but is more noticeable in winter. If left untreated it may cause wall plaster to crumble and paper to lift in the affected area. Mould will rarely be seen where there is rising damp (and then only in the early stages). This is because rising dampness carries with it salts that prevent the growth of mould.

12.4. Condensation and Mould Growth

This is by far the most common enquiry we receive from tenants which often leads to a repair request. Condensation is caused by water vapour or moisture in the air, inside the dwelling, encountering a colder surface, such as a window or wall. The drop in temperature causes water to form on the surface. This water may then soak into the wallpaper, paintwork or plasterwork. Mould spores are invisible to the naked eye but are in the air all around us all the time and will quickly grow on surfaces where condensation has formed into a visible covering.

Condensation can be more prevalent during the colder months, and we often experience a spike in repair requests during autumn and winter. A symptom of condensation is mould growth which is usually found in the corners of rooms, north facing walls and on or near windows. It is also found in areas of little air circulation such as behind wardrobes and beds, especially when they are pushed up against external walls. It also forms in bathrooms and kitchens as they are high moisture areas or in properties which are overcrowded.

All homes are affected by condensation at some point, however certain activities can increase the problem and considered routines can eliminate this from becoming a bigger problem. Condensation and mould growth can be a consequence of how a home is used. Cooking, washing and drying clothes indoors, etc., all produce water vapour that can only be seen when tiny drops of water (condensation) appear on colder surfaces such as walls, windows, ceilings or mirrors and often

unseen on clothing, shoes and furniture. The amount of condensation in a home depends upon several things, most importantly:

- How much water vapour is produced within the home.
- How cold or warm the property is.
- Level of air circulation (ventilation).
- How well the property has been insulated.

Simply turning up the heating will not resolve the problem, this may only temporarily reduce condensation. All factors may need to be considered to reduce the problem. The first sign of a problem is often water vapour condensing on windows and other cold surfaces, which then takes a long time to disappear. This allows the surfaces to become damp, resulting in mould growing on these damp areas.

13. Our Approach to Managing Dampness, Mould and Condensation

We will, at all times, work to raise awareness with our tenants, and provide advice and support in managing damp, mould and condensation. We will do this through tenant information videos, brochures, newsletters and by communicating with our tenants, both in person and by telephone and email. Some of the key advice we offer to tenants includes the following:

- Wipe down effected windows and sills in the morning, wringing out the cloth rather than drying it on a radiator.
- Never dry clothes on radiators.
- Keep vents open and clean.
- Keep internal doors open and open windows, where possible, each day.
- Cover saucepans when cooking.
- Close doors in wet areas to stop the spread of moisture to other rooms, and always have the extractor fan on.
- Maintain an adequate temperature in the home.
- Maintain a gap between furniture and walls.
- Dehumidifiers can benefit the air quality in the home and help manage condensation.
- It's possible to remove mould using diluted vinegar and a microfibre cloth. If it cannot be removed this way, diluted bleach or a commercial product may be needed. Follow manufactures instructions, wear gloves and a mask using bleach or commercial products.

We commit to:

- Provide and maintain a comfortable, warm and healthy home, free from damp, mould or disrepair by working with our tenants.
- Recognise that having mould issues in a home can be distressing for our tenants and ensure we are supportive in our approach.
- Work in partnership with tenants to resolve and understand how to reduce dampness, mould and condensation issues.

- Make sure the fabric of our homes is protected from deterioration and damage resulting from, or contributing to, dampness and mould.
- Ensure responsive repairs to alleviate dampness and mould are carried out as quickly and efficiently as possible to minimise damage to the fabric, fixtures and fittings of the property.
- Know our stock and the archetype of properties and components that have a higher likelihood to suffer from damp and mould.
- Plan resources to respond to higher demand. For example, during the winter months.
- Provide staff with the skills to identify and differentiate between signs of dampness and condensation and understand the causes and remedies.
- To support our tenants in ways to reduce dampness and condensation in their home and how to make positive changes.
- To make best use of products and tools to help tenants to best manage their homes and use our data to better understand cause and solutions.
- To take account of the issues of dampness and condensation when designing investment programmes, for example heating and ventilation.
- To comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements and sector best practice.

14. Procedure

Our process is set out within the accompanying procedure 'Managing Dampness, Mould & Condensation Procedure'.

15. Tenant Satisfaction and Monitoring

Feedback from tenants on the quality of our service is important to us to help in the continuous improvement of this service. We are committed to working in partnership with our tenants to achieve improvements in service delivery and performance. We will do this by tracking and analysing performance of the repair's services and contractors who deliver it and by working with tenants through a range of involvement initiatives including:

- Monthly satisfaction surveys on all completed repairs.
- Tenant engagement groups and forums.
- General surveys on the overall standards of our services.

We will consult tenants on this policy and seek their feedback and approval through our Tenant Shadow Group.

16. Feedback and Complaints

All comments and complaints concerning Circle VHA's repairs and maintenance services are dealt with by our Feedback and Complaints Policy. We welcome tenant feedback, as this allows us to improve the services we deliver. Tenants can contact us via phone, email, or online.

17. Monitoring and Compliance

This Policy will be reviewed every two years and as required by legislation, regulation or internal organisational change.

We will monitor the number of repairs requests related to dampness, mould and condensation through our Customer Services Team and report monthly to the Leadership team.

We will ensure that this data is reported to our Assets Team to inform our planned maintenance programme and stock condition data.

18. References

- [Circle VHA Responsive Repairs Policy](#)
- [New Homes – Building Regulations 2019 Part F](#)
- [Existing Homes – Housing \(Standards for Rented Housing\) Regulations 2019](#)

19. Appendices

- Managing Dampness, Mould and Condensation Brochure.

[Link to Appendices SharePoint Location](#)