



ARCHITECTS ADVISORY SERVICE

Inside your Home – Maintenance

Give your home a regular overall inside maintenance check and attend to a problem before it gets worse. We show you how to limit the damage and save money.

If you think small cracks, mould and odd smells in the house are not major problems with the structure of your home then think again. It could mean water damage, destructive pests or deterioration so it is best to detect the problem and repair it before the damage advances. Here are some tips on ways you can maintain your home.

Maintaining the Roof Space

Your roof frame and ceiling rafters can warp and deflect over time and usually there is little chance of a serious problem developing. But, re-roofing with a material heavier than the original covering can do serious damage unless the roof framing is strengthened.

If you notice unusual smells when examining the roof this could indicate the intrusion of animals or water. Animals can cause damage such as stained ceilings and chewed wiring so remove them as soon as possible and get an electrical safety check once the pests are gone.

Make sure your roof insulation is appropriate for your climate, spread evenly throughout the roof space and kept well clear of downlights, electrical transformers and other heat generating devices. Check it after the space has been accessed by a tradesperson – they are not always the most diligent in leaving the space as they found it!

Uneven or inadequate insulation can lead to heat leakage or uneven heat gain and increased energy bills. Electrical hot spots can be a serious fire hazard.

Maintaining Ceilings and Walls

Most plaster walls will crack in time, but provided your footings and foundations are sound: often all that is required is to patch cracks when re-painting to improve appearances.

However, recurring cracks may indicate a structural problem and warrant further investigation. Condensation and roof leaks may eventually cause the walls and ceilings in old homes to bulge as the plaster, fixings or framing deteriorates. If the bulging plaster sounds hollow (or drummy) when tapped re-plastering or new plasterboard may be required.

If your house is brick, check the walls regularly for rising damp, which is caused by a breakdown of the damp-proof course, brought on by damp external conditions and often made worse by inadequate sub-floor ventilation. Take care that you don't create external garden conditions which give rise to rising damp by covering sub-floor vents, or laying beds hard up against walls above the damp-proof course.

Maintaining Living Conditions inside the House

You should aim to maintain a reasonable circulation of air in the house, to prevent stale air, excessive humidity and condensation, all of which may affect your health and cause materials to deteriorate.

Items such as stoves, clothes dryers and showers should all be well vented to the outside of the house.

Long periods of stagnant, moist conditions in your house will encourage mould. Chloride-based cleaners will scrub most of it off, followed by an application of fungicidal paint for future protection.

Jamming Windows and Doors

If windows and doors persistently jam, your footings may be faulty, your stumps may have rotted or your piers may have moved. Jamming is prevalent in older homes where structural subsidence is common.

Regular sub-floor examination will help keep an eye on the situation. Check sub-floor drainage first as very wet soil can contribute to subsidence. Reblocking, re-stumping or underpinning may be required to rectify the subsidence and halt further damage.

Maintaining Services

Have gas leaks fixed immediately. Check the colour of your cook tops gas flame for signs of contamination and danger – natural gas should burn blue. If in doubt get your appliance or supply line checked by qualified serviceperson.

Fuses which blow with increasing regularity indicate a wiring problem and should be attended to immediately. In older homes, blowing fuses may indicate a wiring system coming to the end of its working life. Blown fuses may also occur after the replacement of light fittings, or after recent renovations and extensions, because older wiring can disintegrate when touched and older systems may not have sufficient capacity for additional outlets, light fittings and appliances. Do not attempt any re-wiring work yourself, always contact a licensed electrician.

Cold water systems in older homes can deteriorate very rapidly. If cold water pressure drops significantly, it is worthwhile having a plumber replace the main supply pipe.

Hot water units have a limited life and can fail without warning. External unit deteriorate more rapidly with exposure to the elements and may require replacement every 7 – 10 years.

Temperature control valves may require replacement at even shorter interval depending on the manufacturer's recommendations.

Maintaining Timber Floors

Floors may squeak particularly during dry conditions. You can easily pack fibro-cement pieces or wedges of wood between bearers and joists. This is generally not a structural problem - the timbers are simply warping or shrinking as they dry.

Maintaining tiled wet areas

Bathrooms and laundries and kitchen sinks are naturally wet areas. Current regulations require an impervious finish to all surfaces that are exposed to water, from shower bases and walls, bath surrounds and basin or sink splashbacks. Ceramic tiles fulfill this function well as long as certain features are maintained. Ensure adequate waterproof seals around shower screens, fixtures and shower bases. Check for cracked or drummy tiles and loose or missing grout in showers, bath surrounds and splashbacks: water penetrating behind tiles will encourage the development of timber rot to the wall framing or timber pest infestation. Water resistant structural flooring can deteriorate rapidly with serious loss of structural stability under prolonged exposure to water. Repair all leaks quickly to avoid further deterioration.

Maintaining the Sub-Floor

It is important to remove debris from the sub-floor to help with ventilation which is vital in controlling sub-floor dampness. Damp sub-floors often make the house smell musty and moldy. Black mould may appear on walls, and sometimes white "beards" of mould may appear under the house. Stumps, bearers and joists will rot much faster when subjected to mould and damp conditions. Damp sub-floor conditions can also attract destructive timber pests.

Homes which contain timber stumps as part of their sub-floor structure will eventually be subject to stump rot. Stumps deteriorate first just below ground level, and the best way to extend their life is to keep the ground dry.

Also examine the sub-floor for signs of termites. They build mud tunnels under concrete slabs, over stumps and base walls to get to the house. The first line of defence for both termites and borers is

to keep the sub-floor as dry and as well ventilated as possible and remove any loose timber off-cuts or builder's waste as this provides tasty fodder for hungry termite. One sign of borer damage is the gritty dust residue they leave behind. If you find or suspect a termite infestation, contact a pest controller without delay. Do not attempt to remove or disturb the nest or mud-tubes yourself as this will disperse the colony and make control even more difficult.

If you would like to talk to an Archicentre Australia architect about a particular matter please call us on 1300 13 45 13 or go to archicentreaustralia.com.au