



Architects Advisory Service

Your Home – General Home Tips

Your home may look good but is it safe? How do you maintain health and safety in the home?

Maintaining your property is not just about making sure it looks good but also that it is being kept free of materials that could make you and your family sick. Follow this quick checklist to ensure that your home is a healthy and safe environment:

Lead in Paint

This is very common in homes painted pre- 1970 and can cause interference in the neurological development in young children. To treat, encapsulate old paint by painting over it or seek advice on the most suitable way to remove it. Take care when cleaning up any residue.

Asbestos

This is very common in houses built prior to 1983 and is only of concern if it is not contained. If surfaces are damaged, asbestos strands can be released. Always seek advice from a company that specialises in asbestos detection and removal.

Toxic Mould

Mould can cause asthma, bronchitis, recurrent colds and flus as well as increased humidity and vermin infestations. Clean current infestations with white vinegar and concentrate on fixing any sources of moisture such as condensation, rising damp and leaking pipes. Improving ventilation can also help to keep mould at bay.

Brick Cracking and Subsidence

Extended periods of dry weather and inadequate garden watering may cause footing subsidence and cracking in brickwork, particularly if large trees are planted close to the house. It's important to seek an independent assessment from your local council, Archicentre Australia's Assessment Service or a structural engineer. Fortunately, most cracks only require cosmetic treatment, not significant structural repair.

Termite and Borer Attack

Inadequate sub-floor ventilation, dampness and debris beneath the floor are conditions conducive for termite attack, which can cause significant damage within a period of weeks. Such conditions also encourage borer infestation and timber rot.

Hidden Rising Damp

Rising damp can cause increased room humidity, vermin infestation and toxic mould growth which exacerbates allergies such as asthma. Even minor signs of damp may indicate a far more serious underlying problem and you should consult a damp control company when in doubt.

External Timber

Exterior timbers are susceptible to insect attack and decay and damage from solar radiation (sun) and extreme weather. Maintain the timbers regularly to prevent wet rot and apply a weather-protective stain or paint finish that will

inhibit water entry and protect gaps, joints and end-grain surfaces from moisture.

Decks and Balconies

All outdoor decks and balconies should be regularly checked for visible signs of deterioration. Cracks can build up over time and if untreated, can lead to the balcony no longer having the capacity to support its load. Timber members can rot or be subject to insect attack; whilst metal support brackets and fixings are prone to rust or stress fractures. If in doubt, seek the advice of a qualified Structural Engineer or Building Surveyor.

Building Code Changes

The Building Code of Australia is regularly updated and you are only required to bring the house up to new standards when doing renovations. However from a safety and regulatory point of view, it can also be a good idea to upgrade. Specific areas to focus on are

the pool, roofing, water supply, security, electrical wiring and fire prevention.

Check Builder Guarantees and for illegal constructions

When you engage a builder, check they are registered with the appropriate authorities and that the work is insured so that you don't incur extra costs if something is discovered after completion. Also, check the building approvals that have been lodged and approved with the vendor, solicitor and local council so that you are not held liable for any illegal existing extensions or renovations.

If you would like to talk to an Archicentre Australia architect – a building expert - about a particular matter, please call Archicentre Australia on 1300 13 45 13 or go to www.archicentreaustralia.com.au