

Home Maintenance - Basements

Introduction

Water is the greatest problem in construction and can cause many problems within your home. Unfortunately, there are numerous ways that water enters your home which can create excess water around the foundation. Water pipes can sweat. The eaves trough and downspouts may not be diverting enough water away from the foundation. There could even be an issue with the sump pump. All basements have the same potential problems. The trick is learning where in each type of basement to look for the warning signs.

Unfinished Basements

In an unfinished basement there are clear visible signs on the floors, walls, and window frames of potential problems to come. When the signs start to appear, it is wise to talk to a professional contractor. The signs include efflorescence, damaged paint, cracks in walls and floors, and puddles forming. By letting a professional know when these signs are starting it can save the problem from becoming larger.

Efflorescence

Efflorescence is a chalky white stain. It is residue from water being released from concrete. Areas you can find this residue is at the joint between the floor and the wall, at openings to the outside.



Damaged Paint

Similar to efflorescence, damaged paint surfaces can tell you that there is a moisture problem developing. This is not a harmful sign, but it should be inspected to find the cause. Damaged paint requires a little more work to repair. The damaged paint will need to be scraped off. Then the area will need to be sanded in order to repaint.

Puddles

This sign is a major problem. Any puddles found in your basement should be immediately looked into. Standing water in the basement is dangerous to your health and the health of your pets. The cause should be found and repaired as quickly as possible.

Cracks

Any cracks in the walls and floor have the potential to become serious problems. The longer a crack is allowed to develop the more it will cost to repair and more serious damage it can cause. This is a problem that will require professional help to repair.

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Finished Basements

Unfortunately, finished basements are better at hiding the problem for longer than an unfinished basement. In a finished basement, what you can see is only about half of what exists. When the signs in a finished basement become noticeable it is best to inform a professional contractor as soon as possible. The signs in a finished basement include discolouration and damage to finished surfaces.

Discolouration

Discolouration seems like a very broad term, but there are 4 main ways discolouration happens in your home. One is sunlight, which will cause colours to lighten where the light continuously strikes. Two is smoke which is caused from burning dinner, cigarettes, and marijuana. The smoke will usually turn upper walls and ceilings a yellow or black shade. Three is electrical issues, and four is water. Discolouration should be investigated by professionals to figure out the cause, especially when it cannot be wiped away with a warm damp cloth or is on an electrical fixture. Areas to watch for these types of discolouration are around baseboards, outlets, light fixtures, and plumbing fixtures.



Finishes

Drywall, window frames and baseboards have a few stages to water damage. It will first get discoloured. Second it will show signs of mould or mildew growth. If painted, the paint may start to bubble and crack. When you touch it, it will feel spongy. Finally, it will start to crumble and crack. Flooring can also show signs of water. Flooring may start to peel up from the concrete. With laminate and vinyl you may get water bubbles.

Summary

The best thing you can do as a homeowner is to be aware of what warning signs your home is giving you. By knowing what to look for, you can prevent larger future problems. Catching these issues early is the best way to keep you and your family safe and healthy in your home.

A contractor would be able to inspect your basement and offer their professional opinion of what steps should be taken. If unsure what company to call, your local First Nation Housing Department as they may have recommendations.