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Maintain healthy humidity without window condensation

As we prepare once again for our long cold winter, Health Canada recommends that homeowners monitor and maintain a specified humidity level at all times.

For an optimum indoor environment for example, the wintertime relative humidity should be between 30 and 55 percent, depending on health-related needs. When humidity is too low it can aggravate skin conditions and respiratory infections. Levels too high – often indicated by window condensation – increase the spread of mould, mites, bacteria and viruses.

On the days of great temperature differences between inside and out, homeowners often find it difficult to maintain a humidity level above 20 percent before condensation appears on the windows. Excessive moisture rots the wood, stains frames, peels paint, and if ignored, it can lead to mould growth deep inside windows and wall openings. Adjusting the humidifier is supposed to work, but that effort may be futile too. The problem, say home improvement sources, may be in the window itself.

The better windows on the market today for example are constructed for both energy-efficiency as well as for their ability to maintain an even and warm overall surface temperature. To control moisture and mould growth, indoor air must be prevented from condensing on ice-cold glass surfaces – and this is accomplished by a basic

rule in applied science: construct windows with low-conductivity materials.
No Metal

Too many conventional, or standard new home windows ignore this rule.

"When making window purchasing decisions, avoid glass spacers containing steel or aluminium, even if they claim to provide a warm edge," says Erin Johnson, spokesperson for Edgetech, an industry leader in 'health smart' windows. "Ask instead about foam edging. If your windows are edged with Super Spacer for example - which is made entirely of polymer structural foam – they will deliver the highest thermal performance in the industry. Our data confirms that Super Spacer conducts heat (and cold) at a rate over 950 times lower than aluminium, and 85 times less than stainless steel. Even on the coldest days therefore, with high indoor humidity, condensation on double-pane windows can be efficiently controlled."

To be sure about the structural quality of new windows, look for the certified seal of the Window & Door Manufacturers Association, a designation that assures air and water infiltration testing and rigorous structural trials. Certified manufacturers in Canada who also use the Super Spacer foam edging can be found at www.healthsmartwindows.com.

—News Canada

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