



Leaky Homes!

Many home owners have found themselves in the unfortunate position of owning a leaky home. So what is the problem all about?

New Zealand's building industry has thrived throughout the last few decades, and new houses and subdivisions are now a common sight in most residential areas. However, some buildings are affected by "Leaky Building Syndrome", otherwise known as weather tightness issues. Leaky Building Syndrome is the term given to a building that has not been designed or constructed to perform suitably under normal weather conditions for New Zealand.

This problem has affected homeowners from right across the country, arising in many different property types, including apartments, townhouses, stand alone houses, high spec homes and commercial buildings.

There are many different problems that cause a building to leak. Some of these problems include:

Design: Improper design techniques may cause a building to leak, including those that involve flat roofs, solid balustrades and other common earmarks of a leaky home. The trend towards Mediterranean style homes was a major player in design flaws that caused leaky buildings.

Materials: The use of inappropriate materials, incorrect installation of these or improper design involving some materials may cause weather tightness issues.

In particular, cladding (especially monolithic cladding) has caused a lot of problems in leaky homes; for example, the absence of required cladding cavities may let moisture into the home and trap it in, causing deterioration of the building. Secondly, the use of untreated timber has also contributed widely to the problem. Until recently, this use was acceptable by New Zealand building requirements. However if untreated timber is exposed to moisture, it rots and deteriorates. As many homes in New Zealand are constructed of timber framing, this damage can affect the actual structure of the home.

Construction: In some cases, buildings have not been constructed using correct building practices, or the actual building, when finished, may have differed from the design. Again, the incorrect installation of materials also plays a role in construction issues.

A home that leaks can pose a multitude of problems to the home owner.

First and foremost, the building may be, or may become unsafe. Rotting balconies and deteriorating timber structures can make a leaky building a dangerous place. Leaky home owners should refer to a building inspector to determine the safety of their home.

Secondly, leaky homes can also be hazardous to the occupant's health. Rot and moisture damage can result in the growth of mould and bacteria, which poses a risk to many people, especially young children, the elderly or those prone to allergic reactions or respiratory problems such as asthma.

Thirdly, leaky homes require remedial work. Many home owners find themselves in a situation where they cannot afford to commence remedial work, and will need to seek compensation from elsewhere. In most cases, the property's value will also be directly affected, and the sale of the property may prove difficult.

Need more information? If you need forms, procedures and comprehensive advice, a good starting point to is the Department of Building & Housing website, www.dbh.govt.nz/weathertight-services.

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