

Maintaining your home

The QBCC sees many problems that could be avoided with better home maintenance. Homeowners sometimes think these faults have been caused by poor workmanship, where it may be caused by a lack of routine home maintenance. This fact sheet contains basic information to help homeowners better understand their responsibilities and keep up with their home maintenance.

Listed below are some of the most common home maintenance problems and what homeowners can do to avoid them.

Roof leaks

The QBCC often receives complaints from homeowners about roof leaks. In some cases this could be due to defective building work, but roof leaks are often caused by a lack of home maintenance and cleaning. Cleaning should be conducted regularly, and at least once a year before the wet season.

Leaves and other debris can accumulate on roofs, blocking gutters and downpipes. Dampness around dust and leaf build-up quickly leads to metal corrosion, deterioration and costly roof repairs. Backed-up rainwater can penetrate inside the house and cause further damage to ceilings, walls, and floors. Further, dampness penetrating inside the building can attract termite activity, causing additional damage.

Termites

Termites can attack buildings made of timber, steel, concrete or brickwork at any time. Termites work fast and can quickly cause serious and costly damage to your home. Some buildings have physical termite barrier systems to help prevent termite penetration. Chemical termite treatment can also be applied to help prevent termites attacking the building.

Garden soil or leaf build-up across the termite barrier can allow termites to enter the building. Leaking pipes or dampness caused by other sources inside the building can attract termite activity. If chemical termite treatments are not updated a great deal of damage can occur before anyone is even aware of the presence of termites.

Regularly inspect the outside perimeter of your house including stumps, posts or columns for termite earth tubes. You may notice termite activity in earth tubes running upward across building structures into cracks in the walls.

Keep wood and garden mulch beds away from the outside of a house. Ensure that termite inspections are conducted on your home by a licensed expert at least once a year or every two or three months if your building has a higher risk of termite attack. Be very careful not to rely on an old inspection report. The fact that your house was termite-free last year doesn't mean it still is.

When buying a new home...

- Arrange for a building inspection report on the condition of the building, with particular interest in the termite barrier system and the presence of dampness.
- Arrange for a termite inspection report on past or present termite activity, with particular focus on how termites may have penetrated the building.
- Find out when the building was last treated to prevent termite attack and when the next treatment is due.
- Find out about the physical and/or chemical barriers that apply to the building. Be sure you understand the level of risk the building has to termite attack and the things you need to do in future to prevent damage caused by termite activity.
- Do not assume that some building material such as concrete floors prevent termite attack or that a building that looks neat and tidy and well maintained would not have termites inside.

Looking after your existing home...

- Have a suitably licensed person inspect your home every 12 months (or more frequently if in a high-risk area).
- Ensure timber pergolas, verandahs and steps are not in contact with the ground.
- Termites can make nests in trees, stumps or timber-sleeper walls and may be a source of termite infestation.
- Do not leave untreated timber lying around your yard or against the walls of your house.
- Do not allow build-up of garden beds or lawn clippings beside the walls of your house, and be extra careful to ensure that 'weep holes' (the small ventilation hole in-between two bricks, near the ground) do not end up below soil level.
- If the floor is on stumps or brick piers, regularly inspect the 'ant caps' (the metal sheet that protrudes horizontally beyond the sides of the post) to ensure that earth tubes have not been built by termites across the 'ant cap' into the building. Make sure no flooring timbers are in contact with the ground.
- Learn how to check for early signs of termite activity. This includes earth tubes, veins or a gallery of tubes running up the side of your home and evidence of disturbance around cracks or gaps in the dwelling. Always ensure you thoroughly check damp areas around your dwelling, e.g. around leaking taps, hot water systems and air-conditioning units.

Wooden decks

Anyone with concerns about timber decks should engage a QBCC-licensed builder or pre-purchase building inspector or engineer to inspect the structure.

If you have timber decks, find out from a timber expert or timber manufacturer what maintenance is recommended to maintain the timber deck, considering the climate and its location. Timber decks are often painted or oiled. In tropical areas decks may need re-coating every six or 12 months. Follow the manufacturer's maintenance guidelines.

Subsidence

Your home could be heaving or subsiding as a result of building foundation movement. Depending on the soil type and location, building footings move according to the water content of soils.

Trees may contribute to subsidence as tree roots can interfere with the building structure, or can alter the moisture content of the soil near the footings. For example, cutting down a well established tree adjacent to your home could create a subsidence problem. Conversely, a planted tree adjacent to the building, when grown, can take up a lot of ground water and cause ground shrinkage and subsidence. Poorly landscaped gardens can wrongly direct ground rainwater flows towards the building or cause water ponding at the base of the building. Ponding of rainwater near footings should be avoided, and rainwater flows directed away from the building.

For more information on subsidence, refer to *A simple 'how to' guide to preventing structural damage to your home*. Download it for free from the QBCC website or pick it up at your local QBCC office.

Sealed driveways and pathways

To maintain the appearance of sealed driveways and paths, manufacturers recommend that driveways and paths should be re-sealed on an annual basis and homeowners should only clean sealed concrete with products recommended by the manufacturer.

Engaging trades after construction is complete

Be careful when starting new projects that additions or alterations do not damage or adversely affect the existing building work. For example, be careful to protect the existing termite barrier system from new structural additions or new garden beds. Do not introduce excessive loads from insulation, air conditioning or electrical work onto plasterboard ceilings. If you share a fire separating wall with your neighbour, be sure that TV, internet or electrical wires do not penetrate the fire wall barrier.

For more information:

The QBCC can provide advice in relation to what building work means and also assist with disputes between you and your contractor. Visit QBCC's website or call QBCC on 1300 272 272. For advice on specific maintenance issues please contact your builder or product manufacturer.