

A Guide to Preserving the Value of Your Home

THE HOMEOWNER'S HANDBOOK



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Section 6: Exterior Moisture— Its Effect on a Home

One important step you can take to prevent foundation damage is to monitor for signs of water in and around your home's structure. Too much moisture can seriously damage your home in several ways, including the following:

- Wood could soften, warp, rot, and even fail.
- The foundation could shift, heave, or settle. This can result in cracked walls, sloping floors, or doors that stick or fail to close.
- Pipes, ductwork, and other equipment could corrode.
- The effectiveness of insulation is reduced.
- Sidewalks and driveways could heave or settle. People could be injured by tripping.
- Personal items kept in a basement or crawl space could be damaged or ruined.
- Harmful molds and mildew could grow. These can cause respiratory illness in some people.

To protect your home, you need to be aware of where and how moisture becomes a problem.

The fact is, 90 percent of moisture problems start on the roof. If the water that hits the roof isn't directed away from the foundation, you could end up with water in the basement or crawl space. That is why a properly designed roof drainage system

needs to be a priority in every home.

The drainage system involves gutters, scuppers, and downspouts. Together, they collect water from the roof and move it properly to the ground and away from the foundation. "Properly" is the key word. The water must be properly directed so that it does not pond near the foundation. Water from the roof, water hitting the sides of the home, and even water falling next to the home needs to be channeled away from the foundation. All downspouts should be extended or piped to a discharge well away from the vicinity of the home.

Sloping the ground surrounding the foundation is another good way to properly dispose of water. In general, 1 inch of fall for every foot of distance away from the foundation is sufficient. We recommend that at least the first 6 feet be sloped.



1-20 Swale



1-21 Swale

If your lot does not lend itself to extended slopes away from the home, a system of “swales” can be used to channel the water. Photos 1-20 (left) and 1-21 (left, below) show swales designed to keep water away from the foundations on these homes.

Other drainage systems can be buried when the home is built. These include foundation, French, and curtain drains. Photo 1-22 (right) shows a foundation drain before the backfill is placed. Gravel and rocks channel water extremely well, which is why they are being used here.

These drains channel the water to a sump cavity. The cavity is usually located in a corner of the basement or crawl space. If water collects in the sump, a sump pump can be installed to pump the water out and away from the building. The white pipe in Photo 1-23 (below) is the exterior portion of a sump pump discharge. Notice how the water is discharged well away from the foundation and not into the sewer.

Your roof, as well as your crawl space, can be a haven for moisture. It is important to ventilate both places. Gable, roof, soffit, and ridge vents all help to hold down moisture levels in the attic. Plastic sheeting, foundation vents, and forced circulation can be used to reduce moisture levels in your crawl space.



1-22 Foundation drain



1-23 Exterior portion of sump pump discharge

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